
4th September, 2012

Name of Cabinet Member:

Cabinet Member (Children and Young People) – Councillor O'Boyle

Director Approving Submission of the report:

Director of Children, Learning and Young People

Ward(s) affected:

All

Title:

Annual Report of the Coventry Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) 2011-2012

Is this a key decision?

No

Executive Summary:

This is the third Annual Report of the Coventry Independent Reviewing Service, covering the period from 1st April 2011 to 31st March 2012, as required by statutory guidance, the Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) Handbook 2010.

The report provides information for the Lead Member with responsibility for children, young people and corporate parenting on the work undertaken by the IRO service, and any issues that have arisen regarding how the Local authority exercised its role as Corporate Parent for all Looked After children in Coventry during that period.

In order for the aspirations and expectations for Children in our Care and Care Leavers to be realised, it is important that the Lead Member and the Scrutiny Board responsible for achieving them receives regular reports that set out progress. The annual Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) report is part of that process. As a national requirement, its primary purpose is set out in the Independent Reviewing Officer's Handbook (section 7.2).

The report focuses on the Independent Reviewing Officer's functions. In particular the timeliness of reviews, the participation of children in their reviews and ensuring that permanency plans are in place to avoid children drifting in care. It also identifies how many cases were the subject of the care plan resolution process, and whether any cases were referred to Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service.

Recommendations:

The Cabinet Member is asked to note the report to update on the management of children's cases by the Independent Review Officers.

List of Appendices included:

Appendix 1 – The 3rd Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report and related appendices

Other useful background papers:

None

Has it been or will it be considered by Scrutiny?

Yes at Scrutiny Board 2 on 11/10/12

Has it been or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?

No

Will this report go to Council?

No

Report title:

1. Context (or background)

1.1 The report provides information for the Lead Member with responsibility for children, young people and corporate parenting on the work undertaken by the IRO service, and any issues that have arisen regarding how the Local authority exercised its role as Corporate Parent for all Looked After children in Coventry during that period. As required by statutory guidance, the Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) Handbook 2010.

1.2 In April 2011 the new IRO Handbook came into force thus changing guidance in working practice and including the following additional duties for IROs:

- To maintain on-going contact with young people during the Review period.
- To monitor a child's "case" on an on-going basis and not just the Review.
- Statutory duty to appoint an IRO to every looked after child within 5 days of them becoming looked after;
- Recommended caseloads for IROs of between 50-70 looked after children;
- New requirements for availability of recommendations (within 5 working days) and full review reports within 20 working days of the review taking place;
- New requirements for a review to take place before a child ceases to be looked after or moves from a regulated to a non-regulated placement;
- New thresholds for conducting reviews of short-breaks ;
- New requirements for the IRO to see the child before the review and maintain contact between Reviews;
- New requirements to track all cases and to be informed of key changes, which might lead to an early review taking place;
- New powers to adjourn reviews;
- New powers to refer to Cafcass during dispute resolution processes or to seek independent legal advice ; and
- New requirements in respect of children looked after placed in custody and young people subject to pathway plans; and
- The role and functions of the IRO Manager.

1.3 Management Guidance within the IRO Handbook requires that IROs are independent of the case management for the cases they review. The IRO service sits within the Safeguarding Children Service, under the leadership of the Assistant Director for Strategic Services and the IROs are directly line managed by the Review and Quality Assurance Manager who is one of the the service specialists for Safeguarding (children).

1.4 The report sets out:

- The current make up and capacity of the IRO team and how the service meets its independence
- The arrangements and procedures around quality assuring and monitoring of the Local Authority's case planning and how the IRO challenges any concerns that arise from these processes
- Arrangements to ensure the participation of children, young people and families in the Looked After and child protection processes, including a report on feedback from parents and family members who have attended child protection conference, which indicates a high level of satisfaction with the child protection processes and with parental support and involvement in this area of work.
- The performance of the IRO team in terms of numbers of reviews undertaken for children subject to child protection and looked after processes and developments such as the introduction of statutory Looked After Reviews for all relevant children with disabilities who are having overnight short breaks.
- The report gives details of current IRO caseloads including children looked after and subject to child protection plans and discusses the capacity issues for the IRO service and management arising to meet local and national performance targets.
- Identifying the administrative challenges and support.

1.5 IROs also contribute to a range of other statutory and non-statutory functions on behalf of the local authority and the Local Safeguarding Children Board, including:

- Independently chairing all Initial and Review Child Protection Conferences in respect of children 'at risk' of significant harm or subject to a Child Protection Plan;
- Representing children's social care within Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) in respect of sex and violent offenders; and
- Delivering a range of safeguarding children training
- IRO explicitly link with a performance surgeries for looked after children and safeguarding
- IRO attend the missing from care and home multi agency panel

1.6 National developments - The Department for Education has undertaken a recent review of the role of the IRO in relation to their impact on the outcomes of looked after children and whether the current statutory duties and guidance about their role are still appropriate. The review took account of submissions from key voluntary organisations; recent Ofsted inspection reports; interim findings from the Family Justice Review and 1,500 children's views of the IRO role commissioned by the Children's Rights Director

The review concluded, "the IRO role, if effective, is a crucial part of the accountability mechanism for ensuring that children in care receive a first-class service from local authorities." Both the Family Justice Review and Roger Morgan's (Children's Rights Director for England) survey show strong support for the IRO by recognising their importance and distinctive role in promoting the voice of the child and quality assuring the care planning process.

1.7 The Family Justice Review (November 2011), recommends that all *'local authorities should review their Independent Reviewing Officer service to ensure that it is effective'*, paying particular attention to adherence to guidance regarding IRO caseloads.

1.8 The focus of the service over the following 12 months will focus on

- Focus on the Fundamental Service Review priorities and working with operational services and partners to deliver on
 - improving outcomes for children
 - securing permanence and adoption for children
 - safely reducing the number of children looked after
 - reducing delays for children
- Contribute to the improving performance and development of performance dashboard for the IRO service focusing on the quality of care planning and reporting arrangements for IRO functions particularly around adoption and permanency planning,

2. Options considered and recommended proposal

Not relevant

3. Results of consultation undertaken

Not relevant

4. Timetable for implementing this decision

Not relevant

5. Comments from Director of Finance and Legal Services

5.1 Financial implications - There are no specific financial implications.

5.2 Legal implications –

6. Other implications

None

6.1 How will this contribute to achievement of the Council's key objectives / corporate priorities (corporate plan/scorecard) / organisational blueprint / Local Area Agreement (or Coventry Sustainable Community Strategy)?

The role of the Independent Reviewing Officer provides for an independent oversight of how the Local Authority exercises its statutory responsibilities towards the children in its care as Corporate Parent and towards children in need of protection within the city, and individual review, and monitoring of the care planning for all children who are looked after by Coventry. The Annual IRO Report therefore provides information on how these responsibilities are being undertaken, both by the IRO Service and by the Local Authority.

6.2 How is risk being managed?

There are some risks associated with the capacity of the IRO Service to meet all its statutory responsibilities in the light of the increase in child protection plans and the consistently high numbers of Looked After children. The consequences of this are that IRO caseloads remain significantly higher than recommended in the Care Planning, Placements and Case Review Regulations 2010 (The CYPA 1989 Regulations and Statutory Guidance) and the IRO

Handbook 2010, and that the timescales for the electronic records of these meetings are not always met.

These risks are met through a clear strategy agreed between the Safeguarding Children Service managers, the IROs and the Business Support Centre staff around the prioritisation of child protection minutes completion on Protocol. Child protection reviewing timescales are prioritised, and the timeliness of these have been maintained.

6.3 What is the impact on the organisation?

The impact of the capacity issues addressed above is that the IRO Service has to prioritise the areas of responsibility it can focus on, with the result that developmental work has not been progressed as effectively and some key performance indicators, e.g. Looked After Review and Initial child protection conference timeliness, have been affected.

6.4 Equalities / EIA

An Equality Impact Assessments (EIA) requires updating in the light of the new requirements and is scheduled for completion in 2013. The groups impacted by these matters are Looked After children, children in need of protection and their parents, children with disabilities, and adults who work with children and young people through the Safeguarding procedures in relation to concerns and allegations against this group.

6.5 Implications for (or impact on) the environment

None

6.6 Implications for partner organisations?

The arrangements for partnership working with child protection and other partner agencies are scrutinised through the LSCB. The IRO Service has a role in identifying key issues for partner agencies working with children and young people around how they are exercising their responsibilities towards these vulnerable groups.

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This report is published on the council's website:

www.coventry.gov.uk/councilmeetings

Appendices

Appendix 1. Red Amber Green Looked After Care Plan Quality Assurance doc.

Appendix 2. Case examples

Appendix 3. Regional IRO Pledge

Appendix 4. The views of parents and young people who attend Initial and Review child protection meetings – Report on Feedback forms.

Coventry City Council

Children Learning & Young People Directorate

Independent Reviewing Service

Annual Report

April 2011 to March 2012

Annual Report of the Coventry Independent Reviewing Officers

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This is the third Annual Report of the Coventry IRO Service, Located in the Safeguarding Children Service within the Children Learning and Young People's Directorate. The report covers the period from 1st April 2011 to 31st March 2012.
- 1.2 Two key pieces of legislation and national guidance relating to both Child Protection and Looked After processes which are both specifically relevant to the IRO role. These are the
- Care Planning, Placements and Case Review Regulations and the IRO Handbook
 - Working Together to Safeguard Children 2010.
- 1.3 The Care Planning, Placements and Case Review Regulations and the IRO Handbook statutory guidance is part of a suite of new guidance issued in 2010 to set out how local authorities should fulfil their responsibilities in relation to care planning and the placement and review of plans for Looked After Children and was implemented April 2011.
- 1.4 The Independent Reviewing Officer Handbook 2010, (the statutory guidance for Independent Reviewing Officer services) requires that an Annual Report is provided for the Lead Member with responsibility for children, young people and corporate parenting, on the work undertaken by the IRO service.

This sets out that the report must:

'Identify good practice but should also highlight issues for further development, including where urgent action is needed'. IRO Handbook 2010

1.3 It should also cover:

- The procedures for resolving concerns, the local dispute resolution process and an analysis of the issues raised and the outcomes;
- The development of the IRO service, caseloads, make up of the team and how it reflects the identity of the Looked After children population
- The extent of participation of children and their parents;
- The number of reviews that are held on time and the number that are held out of time with reasons for this
- Whether any resource issues are putting at risk the delivery of a quality service to all looked after children.

- 1.4 This report will focus largely on the two main areas of responsibility for the Independent Reviewing Officers - Looked After care planning and reviewing, and Child Protection planning and reviewing processes.

Statutorily the Annual Report of the IRO is not required to consider child protection processes but as these are an integral part of the IRO role in Coventry, this report will include information regarding the IRO team's child protection activity.

A brief summary of the other roles and responsibilities undertaken by the IRO service is included, and also a final section on priorities for 2012-13.

2.0 Current Structure and Management of the IRO Service in Coventry

'the development of the IRO service including information on caseloads, continuity of employment and the make up of the team and how it reflects the identity of the children it is serving'
IRO Handbook 2010

2.1 Staffing

The IRO establishment increased from 8 full time equivalent (fte) IROs in 2010/11 to 10.5 fte IROs (12 post holders) in 2011/12 and they are managed by the Review and Quality Assurance Manager. This represents a significant increase in managerial and supervision responsibilities.

- 2.2 The CLYP Leadership considered the reviewing officer capacity in the light of the Safeguarding and Looked After Children Ofsted Inspection of 2011.

The Inspection report concluded that, *'the independent reviewing officers workloads are too high due to the numbers of children looked after, and there is insufficient capacity for them to meet all the requirements of the new statutory guidance on care planning, especially in relation to spending time with children and monitoring the effectiveness of care planning between statutory reviews.'* And recommended:

Within three months:

the Children, Learners and Young People Service should ensure there is sufficient capacity for independent reviewing officers to meet all the requirements of the Care Planning, Placement and Care Review (England) Regulations 2010'

- 2.3 As a result additional IRO capacity was agreed in 2011 to address:

1. Statutory duties under the Short Breaks Statutory Guidance, which is part of the Care Planning, Placement and Care Review (England) Regulations 2010', to enable the Local Authority to meet its statutory obligations as Coventry had not previously been fully compliant with these regulations because there was insufficient capacity in the IRO team to undertake this role.

1 fte IRO post to address an estimated 100 short breaks reviews

2. To address the new IRO responsibilities and caseloads outlined by 'The Care Planning, Placements and Case Review Regulations 2010 (The CYPA1989 Regulations and Statutory Guidance)' and 'The IRO Handbook 2010' and to address the increase in Child Protection Plans and Looked After children.

1.5 fte IROs to reduce combined caseloads of CP and LAC to 90-100 children per fte IRO

3. The fundamental service review of CLYP increased the capacity of the service by a **further 0.5 fte IRO** post which will bring the establishment of the service to 11 fte post. Recruitment to this post commenced in August 2012.

- 2.3 Two new IROs came into post in Dec 2011 and January 2012, and the part time IRO took up her post in June 2012. There was delay in being able to recruit to the additional IRO posts that had been created during 2011, and the 2.5 additional posts were not filled until December 2011 and January and June of this year. This delay was largely due to the extended notice period required for staff at this level, CRB checks being undertaken, and the complexities of clarifying funding streams for the posts.

There are now 12 individual IROs, with a full time equivalent of 10.4 posts. 10 IROs hold combined caseloads of both Child protection and Looked After cases, and two part time officers specialise, one in child protection work, and one in looked after cases.

Year	Funded FTE posts	Full time IROs	Part time IROs	Total no. post holders
2010/11	8	6	3	9
2011/12	10.5	8	4	12

- 2.4 In the current group of IROs, four are male and eight are female, two IROs are of Asian ethnicity, one is African Caribbean and nine are white and enables the service to reflect the diversity of the Looked After Children in our care. (See table below for ethnicity of current Looked After population)

Ethnicity of Children Looked After at 31 st March 2012		
White	421	73%
Asian	30	5.2%
Black	32	5.5%
Mixed	76	13.2%
Chinese and other	18	3.1%

3.0 Role of the Independent Reviewing Officer in Care Planning

3.1 The quality assurance role of the IRO in all aspects of care planning for children requires the establishment of clear principles of:

- Transparency and clarity around the standards set out in guidance and legislation for Looked After care planning
- A systematic and robust approach to reviewing and monitoring all aspects of the case planning for looked after children, achieved through the Red, Amber Green QA Notification process, and
- Constructive questioning and challenge where needed of the Local Authority work with looked after children and young people, through the Dispute Resolution Process and IRO Management Alerts.

3.2 The IRO must:

- Review the Looked After Care plans for all children, and maintain an oversight of the Local Authorities' conduct of the child's case, and to challenge the Local Authority if the child's needs are not being met and there is drift or delay in delivering on the child's care plan,
- Where necessary the IRO should escalate this challenge up to and including CAF/CASS if the IRO's view is that the child's human rights are being compromised.

3.3 Statutory Reviews of Short Breaks for children with disabilities

3.3.1 Under the Children and Young Persons Act 1989 Regulations and Statutory Guidance children who are having overnight stays as a 'short break' provision under Section 20, Children Act 1989, should have their care plan regularly reviewed.

3.3.2 Over this period the IRO Service has increased the number of Short break arrangements it is reviewing from an average of 20, to completing reviews of all children now in receipt of short breaks and in need of independent reviews. So far this year 64 disabled children have been allocated an IRO, and have received a Short Break review (this cohort is in addition to the total of fully Looked After children).

3.3.3 The service has an IRO with a strong background in working with children with disabilities who has developed a model of undertaking these reviews by including informal 'tea time' meetings in Broad Park House, and where appropriate, integration of the Annual Education Review with the Looked After Review. This enhances the participation of young people and carers in the review process and ensures full integration of the care and education planning for these children. It is planned that this model will be rolled out across all IRO and to all Short Break reviews where it is appropriate.

3.4 Quality Assurance Role, the monitoring of the status of LA care plans and the Dispute Resolution process

'Procedures for resolving concerns, including the local dispute resolution process including an analysis of the issues raised in dispute and the outcomes,' IRO Handbook 2010

3.1.1 The Red Amber Green (RAG) Care Planning Quality Assurance Notifications system for all Care Plans has been in place since 2010. (See Appendix 1). This is completed after every review and gives a clear picture of the quality and timeliness of the care planning for children in Coventry.

3.1.2 Since January 2010 the care planning for all Looked After Child Reviews has been evaluated through a RAG Quality Assurance document. This provides systematic management information and feedback on the status of care planning for individual children to social work teams and managers as to the status of the care planning for all Looked After children, and is sent with the Review decisions to social workers, Team Managers and ISMs after every review.

3.1.3 Periodic reports are provided from the completed RAG forms and these provide useful information to the Review and QA Manager and the Integrated Service Managers in Neighbourhood and Looked After Children Teams.

3.1.4 This document is part of the procedure for addressing care planning concerns between the IRO service and Social work teams.

Red indicates that there are serious delays or other concerns in relation to the care plan for a child, requiring immediate action.

Amber indicates that there are potential or current concerns or delays that are not requiring immediate action but that need to be addressed.

Green indicates that the planning for a child is appropriate to his/her needs and progressing in a timely way and that all significant aspects of the child's care are satisfactory.

3.4.5 Analysis of the **Quality Assurance Red Amber Green (RAG) notification** reports completed by IROs between 01/04/2011 and 31/03/2012 identified that within that period 1271 RAG forms had been completed. This is an increase of 58 on the previous year. The chart below (see 3.4.9) sets out the analysis of care plans by Red Amber or Green status.

3.4.6 The figures for 2011/12 demonstrate that there has been an improvement in the quality of care planning for children since 2010/2011:

- increase of 8.4% in 'green ' care plans, i.e. care plans that met children's needs fully and where there was no drift or delay than in 2010/11.
- Decrease of 3.9% in Red and 5.5 % Amber plans

3.4.7 This evidences the impact of the increased responsibilities of the IRO under the Care Planning, Placement and Care Review (England) Regulations 2010 and IRO Handbook 2010, which strengthened the IROs ability to monitor the progress of care plans and to challenge more effectively and earlier where there is a risk of delay. Other factors that have also contributing to this improvement are:

- Care planning training provided for all social work staff in 2010/11
- Development of a LAC tracker and focused tracking of cases by managers across service
- Involvement of the Review and Quality Assurance Manager with Permanence Panel
- Increased focus on 'end-to-end care planning' through the FSR, which has raised an increased awareness of the importance of good and timely care planning for Looked After children.

3.4.8 However in spite of the improved care planning over this period, there remains a continued challenge to improve the planning for Looked After children with 11.1% of cases where care planning is either in delay, drift or where significant aspects of the work have not been progressed adequately between reviews.

3.4.9 LA Care Plans Reviewed in Period 01/04/2010 to 31/03/2011

Quality Assurance Red Amber Green (RAG) notification							
Team	Red		Amber		Green		Total no of Care Plans Reviewed
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
15+	8	15.1	14	26.4	31	58.5	53
CDT	17	19.1	13	14.6	59	66.3	89
L A C	129	13.1	177	39.1	340	57.1	595
UAS	0	0	2	14.3	12	85.7	14
NE	16	9.7	44	26.7	105	63.6	165
NW	4	3.6	31	28.2	75	68.2	110
RAS	3	7.1	19	45.2	28	73.5	50
South	12	9.8	50	41	60	49.2	122
Team not recorded	3	4.1	24	32.9	46	63	73
Total 2011-12	141	11.1	374	29.4	756	59.5	1271
Total 2010-11	182	15	423	34.9	608	51.1	1213

3.4.9 An agreed plan for the Data Team to develop an electronic system that could be completed directly onto the database by the IROs has not been completed due to the capacity of the data team. Once this is in place the information will be more accurate and it will be far more economical in terms of staff time and resources.

3.5 Dispute Resolution Process and IRO Management Alert

This document was circulated with the Annual Report 2010-2011 and is available on request

3.5.1 Dispute Resolution processes have been triggered in 33 cases and 12 Management Alerts raised. Currently this information is collected manually by the Review and QA Manager and there is work being developed for this to be able to report more accurately on the processes and the outcomes. A number of examples have been included in the report to demonstrate the effectiveness of this process although there remain challenges in embedding this across CLYP as a process that requires prompt attention and responses from social work managers.

3.5.2 The Escalation/Dispute Resolution procedure was agreed at Leadership level, in February 2011 and it provides a clear framework and an agreed mechanism for :

- Drift, delay and other care planning issues to be addressed robustly within clear timescales and at the right management level
- That the IRO can evidence this transparently and
- That the process is agreed and owned by all relevant managers and staff across Children's Social Care.

3.5.3 The reporting of all Dispute Resolution Management Alerts issued by IROs and the outcomes require improved reporting via Protocol but there are continued complexities around how this can be achieved. Some of the Dispute Resolution IRO Management Alerts in this period have addressed:

- **Delay in delivering key aspects of care planning for Looked After children:** see Appendix 3, Case Study 1
Unacceptable delay in the completion of a specialist mental health/psychological assessment due to difficulties between agencies in agreeing funding responsibilities.
- **Suitability of placements and the views of a Looked After children not being sought appropriately:** See Appendix 2 case study 2
A young person's placement in a residential unit being under threat of termination due to his anti-social and challenging behaviour. Through the IRO's intervention, active support to the young person and co-ordination of the professionals involved, the young person was able to articulate the problems that were causing his behaviours. He was helped to take responsibility for resolving the problems and negotiating a way forward that resulted in the placement being preserved. He remains successfully in the placement.

- **Delays in achieving permanency for Looked After children**
Recent research has highlighted the damage to children when they are in a situation that is not permanent even where the standards of care are good. The IRO team recognised that there was a significant difficulty in progressing these 'links' and getting them agreed formally through the Permanency Panel. One IRO who had a number of children in this situation on his case load took the lead in co-ordinating an escalation of all the cases to senior managers. He liaised closely with the relevant Head of Service, ISMs and IROs to ensure that there was a complete list of all children in need of long term linking and played a significant role in addressing these delays and ensuring that there are now effective processes in place to secure formal 'permanency' for children with long term carers.
- **The care plan not being appropriate to meet the child's needs:**
See Appendix 3, Case Study 3.
Concern about the continued risks to two very young children whom the court made subject to full Care Orders at home with father after five older siblings had been removed because of serious neglect. Both the Local Authority and IRO had serious concerns about the court care plan. The tenacity and determination of the IRO to address the concerns robustly led to a change of plan for the work with this family and to a greatly increased level of input. The parent subsequently started cooperating better with Social Care and improved their standard of parenting.
- **Delays in initiating care proceedings** in line with the agreed Looked After Care plan or Child Protection plan,
- Care plans and pathway plans not being completed or progressed appropriately,
See Appendix 3, Case 4 - IRO Management alert re lack of 'homefinding' for a sibling group of 6.
- Lack of progress on 'homefinding' for a very young child who was subject to a Placement Order, and who had already experienced the breakdown of one adoption placement. That child has now been placed with adopters and an adoption application will be made shortly.
- Wider issues of good practice and professional standards (see Appendix 3, Case example 5)

3.5.3 Whilst at the moment it is not possible to provide clear information about the outcome of all 33 dispute resolution processes, of the seven examples given here, five have been resolved to the IROs satisfaction. The issue of agency responsibility for funding of specialist assessments is the subject of ongoing work and the outcome of the IRO Management Alert re homefinding for a sibling group of six is not clear, although active work has been started on the search for placements.

3.5.4 In spite of the RAG and Dispute Resolution processes having been agreed at Leadership level over twelve months ago there remain ongoing issues around

the ownership of these processes by operational managers and at times IROs do continue to experience difficulties with receiving timely or sufficiently mindful responses, and often need to be very tenacious in their challenge in order to achieve a satisfactory resolution.

3.6 Referrals to CAFCASS

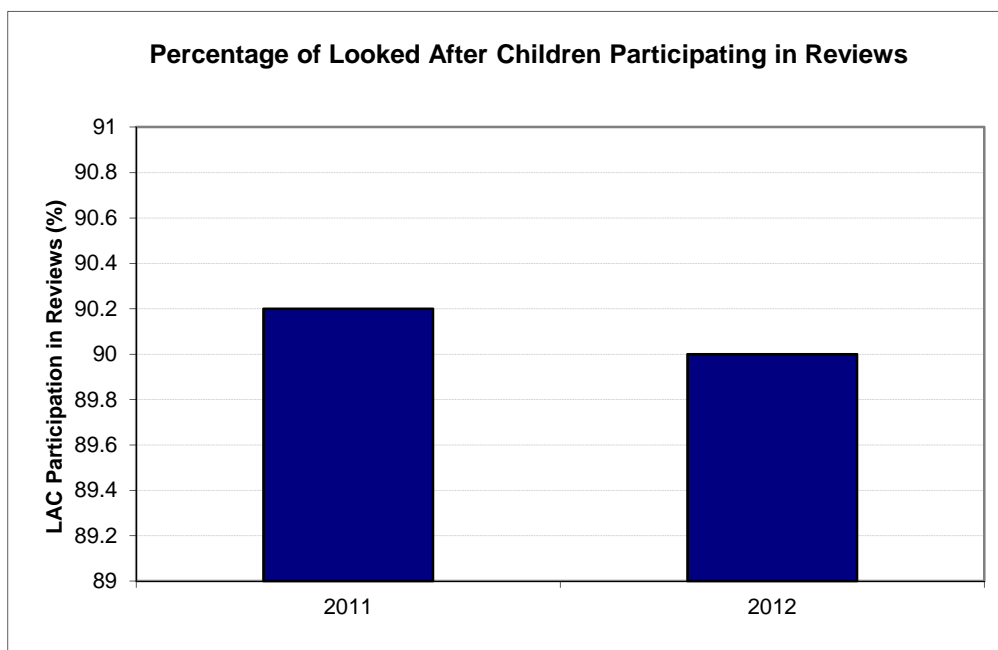
- 3.6.1 The Care Planning, Placements and Case Review Regulations set out that the IRO has a duty to address and seek resolution concerning any delay or drift in relation to the planning for Looked After Children, and that where this cannot be resolved through the Local Authority's internal dispute resolution processes.
- 3.6.2 Referral to CAFCASS should no longer be seen as a last resort and can be considered at any time. The intention of this change is to reinforce the authority of the Independent Reviewing Officer to challenge poor practice. Where this is not possible, the IRO should refer the concern to CAFCASS.
- 3.6.3 The IROs have sought advice from the CAFCASS legal advice line and **no** cases have been formal referred to the service.
- 3.6.4 A joint protocol has been reviewed with CAFCASS in June 2012 and agreement to meet regularly between the IROs and CAFCASS has been secured.

4.0 Children and Young People's Participation

- 4.1 In Coventry the IROs have a very positive focus on the participation of children in care in their reviews. In both child protection and looked after plans, the IRO must ensure that the child's needs are ascertained, understood and taken into account.
- 4.2 The IRO team continue to prioritise the involvement and participation of children and young people in their Looked After reviews, and wherever they can will also maintain some contact with children between reviews. The Annual Regional IRO Conference in 2011 focussed specifically on children's participation in the Care planning and Review process. This was attended by most of the Coventry IROs and from it; a Regional IRO Pledge was developed, (*Appendix 2 Regional IRO conference pledge*).
- 4.3 For statistical purposes, participation can be through physical attendance where the child actively contributes, through a representative (ie advocate), or written consultation, or discussion with the IRO prior to the meeting. Where none of the aforementioned applies, or a child attends but does not contribute to the discussion, this is counted as non-participation.
- 4.4 The service aspires to 100% participation for LAC reviews.

2011 - 91.6% of children subject to a LAC review participated

2012- 90% of children subject to a LAC review participated



- 4.5 The Case examples below outline how IROs ensured the participation of young people and how they make sure that young persons views and wishes are fully addressed in decision making. The first case is around the decision about a young persons legal status, and the second is in relation to a young person's wishes about the sharing of information with a parent who has rejected and abandoned him. Both cases have been anonymised.

Case Example 1- N, aged 17

N and his older sister S had been placed in long term foster care for a number of years. His sister had moved on to independence for the placement. The question of whether the legal status should change had been under scrutiny for some time with consideration of whether the carers should apply for an SGO. There were a number of discussions in the Reviews and between Reviews about this. N was very much part of this and once he had all the information helped the Review come to the conclusion that meant his current legal status remained appropriate (Care Order). N himself expressed the following views:

1. He didn't need his legal status to be changed as he has a very strong emotional attachment to his foster carer who he calls mum. He has a very healthy understanding of his life history and has been very clear about who he wants in his life. He has been able to make this clear both formally and informally. Although his Foster Carers separated a couple of years ago he still regards the male carer as his dad and has kept in touch with him (visiting regularly).

2. N wanted to know how a change in legal status would affect his entitlement to After Care Services and made an independent assessment of that and decided that he wanted to gain all the benefits of a Care Leaver.

3. He raised the issue of fairness in the Review in February and that he felt awkward about this as his sister who is 19 now would feel different if an SGO for her was to be pursued.

4. More important to her was the issue of her surname. Her biological father is not the man named on the birth certificate and she had therefore been given the name of her mother's partner whose abuse of her and her sister had caused her to become Looked After.

She (and her sister) became "known as" Foster Carers surname some years ago at N's request. She wanted to know what she could do about the name on her birth certificate, and she was advised that this cannot be changed, but she can change her surname by Deed Poll. She is satisfied with this. Again she was the one who raised this originally.

N has shown great maturity with the above issues and felt comfortable in discussing this openly within the Review and with the Reviewing Officer. I have known N for over 10 years and she has been to every one of her Reviews bar one (she was on a trip) and therefore she has grown up knowing her view is important and the decision over her legal status has been very much led by her opinions about it. The Local Authority's views can be overwhelming for young people in care but N has been able to air views openly and without any form of confrontation. She has also been helped by her relationship with her carer.

Case Example 2- A , aged 16

A is 16 years old and has been in residential care in Coventry for a year following systematic rejection and emotional abuse by his parent and stepparent.

Despite refusing to care for her son, Adam 's mother made attempts to disrupt his placement, making repeated complaints to, and unreasonable demands of the LA and his carers.

In December 2011, A's family moved to another part of the country making no contact with A or the Local Authority about their plans and leaving no forwarding address.

This was an extremely distressing time for A who was in the process of sitting exams and was concerned about his future. A was in contact with the IRO at this time in respect of placement issues, but also expressed concern about his legal situation given his mother's 'abandonment'. He was anxious about the rights his parent still had to affect his life and whether he could now choose to restrict information given to her.

The IRO sought detailed written legal advice on A's behalf and met with him to share this and discuss implications/options open to him. After consideration by A, a way forward re information sharing and parent's potential involvement in future decision making was agreed formally within the LAC Review, which was then implemented by the SW. A was happy with the outcome.

5.0 Performance Information on Looked After Children.

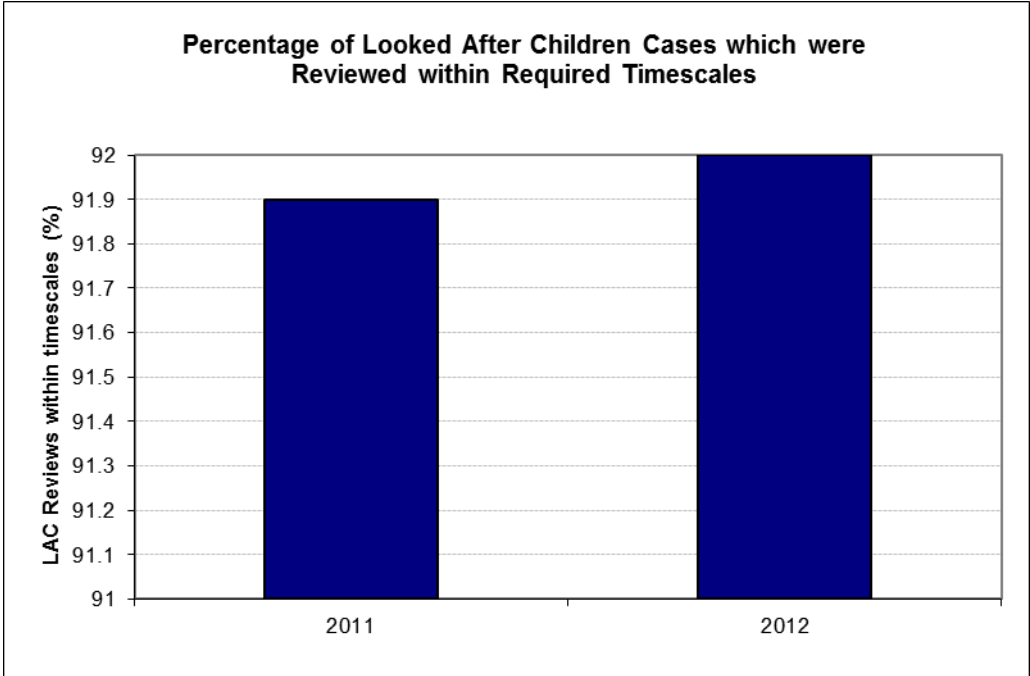
5.1 Timeliness of Looked After Reviews

The number of reviews that are held on time, the number that are held out of time and the reasons for the ones that are out of time. (IRO Handbook 2010)

The target for Looked After Reviews held on time in Coventry is 95%

The performance for 2011/2012 was 92% on time and this is in the context of very stretched capacity to manage continuing high caseloads of both Child Protection and Looked After children, and the need for initial child protection conferences to be prioritised over booked Looked After Reviews at times when there has been pressure on the team to meet high demand for child protection conferences

Year	Coventry	All England
2008/09	94.6%	90.9%
2009/10	96.8%	90.5%
2010/11	91.9%	Not available
2011/12	92%	Not available



5.1.1 The major factors contributing to this target not being met have been the consistent increase in child protection work - combined with the numbers of Looked After children remaining relatively high and the enhanced responsibilities of the IRO under the Care Planning, Placement and Care Review(England) Regulations 2010.

5.1.2 An audit of all late reviews demonstrated that almost all were one to two days out of timescale. There are a number of reasons why a review might be held out of timescale.

- Lack of availability of a key stakeholder, e.g. the child or other significant person
- Demands of the service on either IROs or Social workers that mean the review cannot be held on the planned date because of service pressures and team capacity issues. This has been a more common occurrence over recent months as the increase in initial child protection conferences has led to IROs having to move Looked After Reviews in order to chair additional child protection conferences. Wherever possible the IRO will seek to keep the Looked After Review within timescale. Where this has been necessary the Review and QA Manager has had oversight of this and has signed it off. Some reviews have been delayed by one or two days due to miscalculations by the IRO.
- The lengthy recruitment process for the additional IROs (see 2.3 above) resulted in the service having to absorb the increased workload pressures for most of 2010-2011 particularly when the needs for appropriate induction and training of new staff for this complex role are taken into account.

5.1.3 **Adjournment of Reviews**

Care Planning, Placement and Care Review (England) Regulations 2010 allow for the IRO to decide to postpone the Looked After Review even if this means that it would go 'out of timescale' if he/she decides that there is insufficient information, outstanding reports or assessments or other paperwork that would compromise the reviews purpose.

The IRO deciding that the review needs to be adjourned and rebooked because there is insufficient information available for the Review to make decisions about the child's care plan.

There is currently no way of reporting on this on Protocol

5.2 **Allocation of an IRO within 5 days of the child becoming Looked After**

All children who become looked after must now have a named allocated IRO, and this includes children having a series of Short breaks under Section 20 Children Act 1989 and any who are compulsorily looked after such as those remanded by the court to local authority accommodation or placed on a Secure Order on Welfare grounds.

There is currently no way of reporting on this on Protocol and this is currently under review.

- 5.2.1 The IRO Service in Coventry ensures that all newly accommodated Looked After children are allocated an IRO within 5 working days of becoming looked after via a weekly allocation meeting attended by IROs. Allocation of cases may take place between meetings to ensure that the 5 day timescale is met.
- 5.2.2 It is currently not possible for Protocol to provide a report on the number of children allocated an IRO within 5 days but the current processes of allocating all newly Looked After children at least weekly should ensure that this is achieved in all cases where the correct information is put onto protocol by the social work team.
- 5.2.3 The main reasons why a child may not have an allocated IRO within 5 days are:
- The Service has not been informed of the child becoming looked after.
 - To align child protection and looked after reviewing processes to ensure that the child protection meeting and looked after review are chaired by the same IRO in single meeting wherever possible.
 - The notification of newly accommodated children now takes place through an electronic alert on Protocol and while there have been some delays in notification of newly accommodated children due to incorrect or late completion of the record, the use of Protocol to identify newly accommodated children has improved the ability of the Safeguarding Children Service to allocate newly Looked After children promptly to an IRO.

5.3 Caseloads

- 5.3.1 In last annual report covering the period 2010/2011 we reported combined CP and LAC caseloads for full time equivalent IRO ranging from 110 and 145 cases for a full time IRO. It was anticipated that the increase in IRO capacity would reduce caseloads to 100 per full time equivalent.
- 5.3.2 In March 2012 the caseload per full time equivalent IRO ranged from:
- | | |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Looked After Children | 60 to 85 children |
| Child Protection Plans | Average of 43 |
| Average combined CP and LAC caseload | 100 and 125. |

Whilst the appointment of IROs in 2012 has reduced average caseloads they remain considerably higher than the recommended caseloads of 50-70 children in the IRO Handbook.

The table below sets out caseloads for IROs at the end of July 2012. This shows combined caseloads for most IROs are well above 100, with the more established IROs having caseloads of up to 140, as the majority of the increased child protection work has fallen to them.

IROs caseloads at the end of July 2012				
	FTE	CP	LAC***	Total
Full time	1	32	76	108
	1	24	75	99
	1	46	63	109
	1 *	13	52	65
	1	68	72	140
	1 *	18	51	69
	1	71	62	143
	1	62	74	146
Part Time	0.8	36	76	112
	0.2	18	17	35
	0.4 *		13	13
	0.6	N/A	37	37 + **
	0.6	87	N/A	87
Total	10.6	475	668	1163

* 'Newly Appointed IROs whose caseloads are being built up

** Position of Trust Strategy meetings

*** including 64 short break reviews

5.3.3 It was anticipated that of the total increase in IRO capacity, 1.5 fte post would directly address the combined caseload for a full time IRO down to under 100, but the increase in child protection plans (see 6.1) and continuing high Looked After numbers (see table below) have impacted on this.

5.3.3 A further 0.5 IRO post was agreed through the FSR which will contribute to reducing caseloads. However if the child protection number do continue to rise as projected the team will continue to be very stretched and will experience caseloads well in excess of that recommended by the statutory guidance.

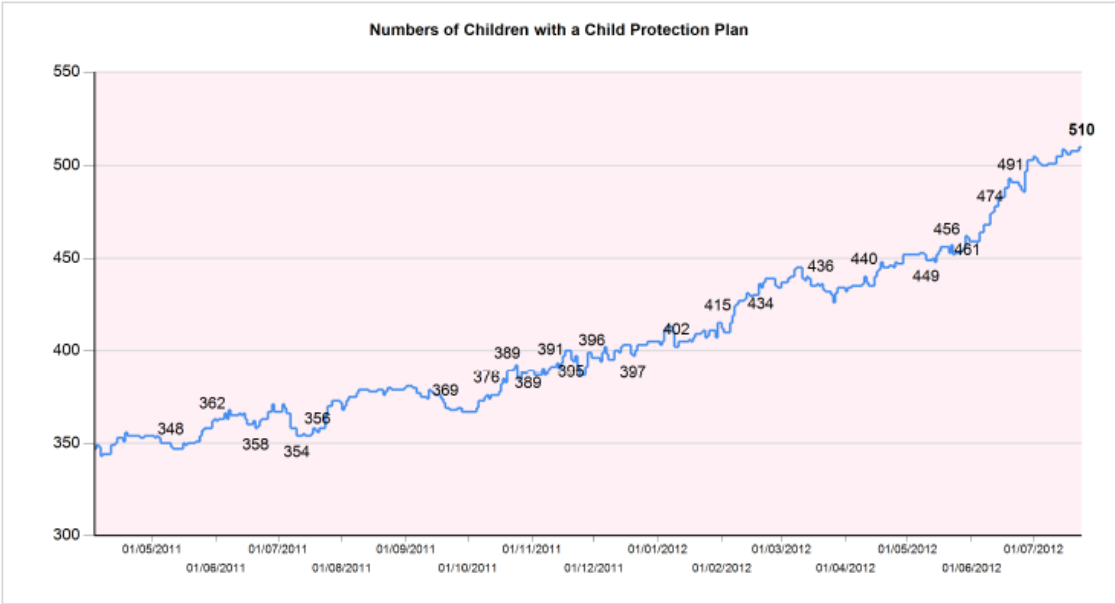
5.3.4 This compromises the IROs ability to meet their statutory responsibilities under Care Planning, Placement and Care Review (England) Regulations 2010.

6.0 Child Protection Processes

6.1 Child Protection Plans 2011-2012

Increase in children on child protection plans from 2007 to 2012		
March 2007	185	
March 2008	181	
March 2009	300	Increased by 39.6%
March 2010	292	
March 2011	352	A further increase of 17%
March 2012	423	A further increase of 20%

6.2 The table above demonstrates that there has been a consistently maintained increase in the number of children with child protection plans over the past 5 years.



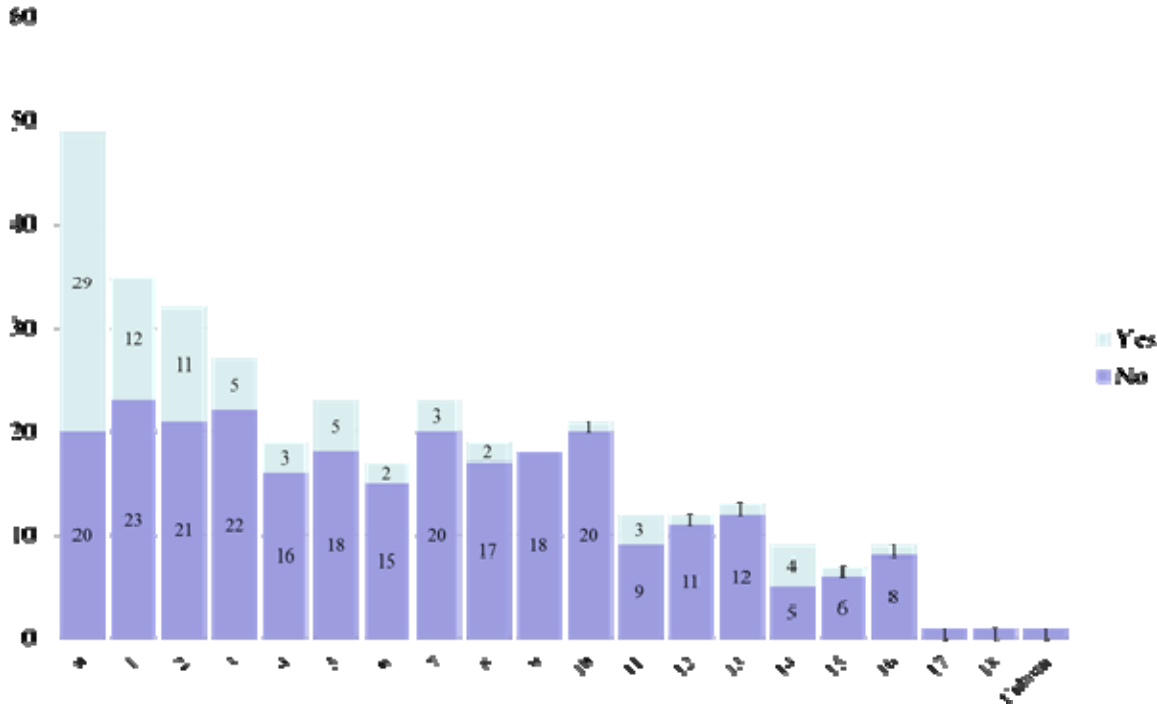
6.3 Performance against Review timescales for Child Protection Plans

Child Protection Cases which were reviewed within required timescales	2010	2011	2012	Increase from last year. 1 case was not reviewed within timescales
	100 %	99.3%	99.7%	

6.4 Additionally, the proportion of children becoming looked after who are already subject to child protection processes has increased markedly. This indicates an increase in court work and permanency planning for these very young children where serious concerns about their parenting have arisen at such an early age.

Children subject to child protection plans who become looked after			
	2011	2012	An overall increase of 3.5% 39.9% of under 4 year olds 59% for 1 year olds
Number CP Plans ended in year	303	318	
Number of CP to LAC in year	76	91	
% CP to LAC	25.1%	28.6%	

6.4.1 The chart below demonstrates the correlation between child protection plans and children becoming looked after in June 2012



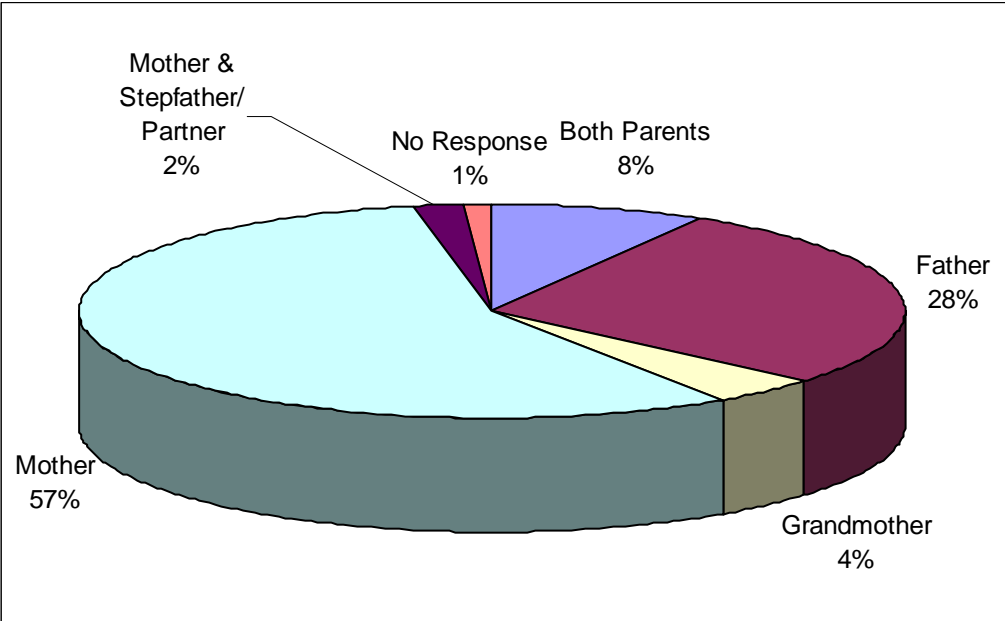
6.2 Parental and Child/ Young Person involvement in Child Protection Conferences

6.2.1 The Safeguarding Children Service continues to prioritise the participation of parents and where appropriate, older children, in the child protection processes. All the IROs spend time with parents and any young people who attend conferences, before the meeting, preparing them for the meeting, explaining the processes and how the meeting will be conducted, and ensuring that they feel as able as possible to share their views and participate in the decision making.

6.2.2 Over the past year we have developed and introduced a feedback form to collect systematically the views of parents and young people who attend Initial and Review child protection meetings about their views and experience of these meetings. The forms ask for views about how well the participants felt they were prepared for the conference, whether the arrangements to support them to participate were helpful or not and whether the meeting helped them to understand what the child protection problems are, how the plan is meant to tackle these issues effectively and whether in their view it will be helpful.

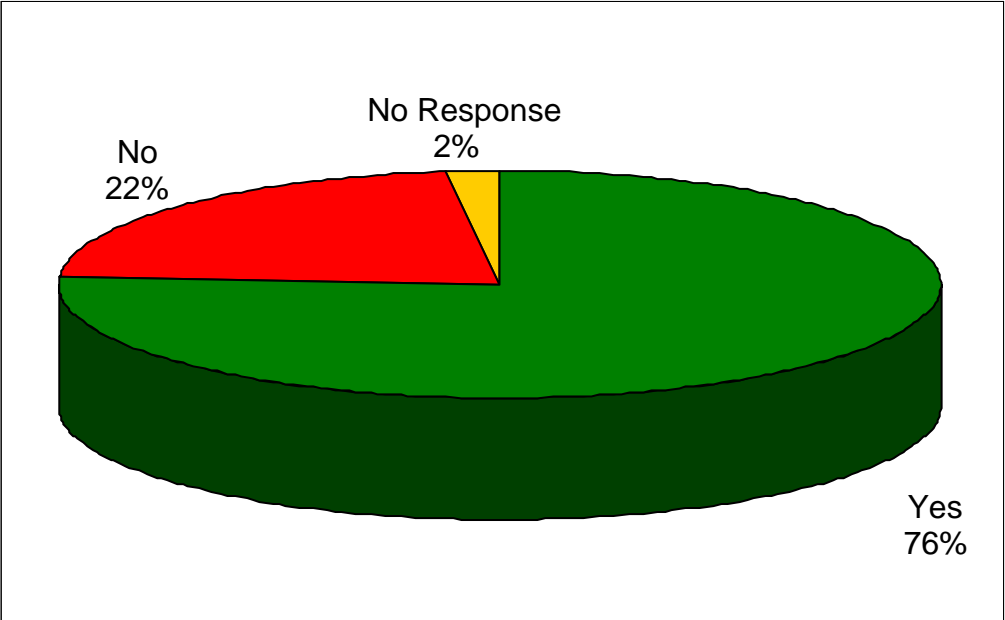
6.2.3 This form was introduced in January 2012, and all parents, and other key family members, who attend the meetings have been asked by the Chair to complete the feedback form after every meeting. The forms are completed anonymously, and 96 forms have been completed in all. A full report is included as Appendix 5 with graphs showing the outcome of this analysis, some of the key outcomes have been highlighted below.

6.2.4 Relationship of Questionnaire Respondent to the child :



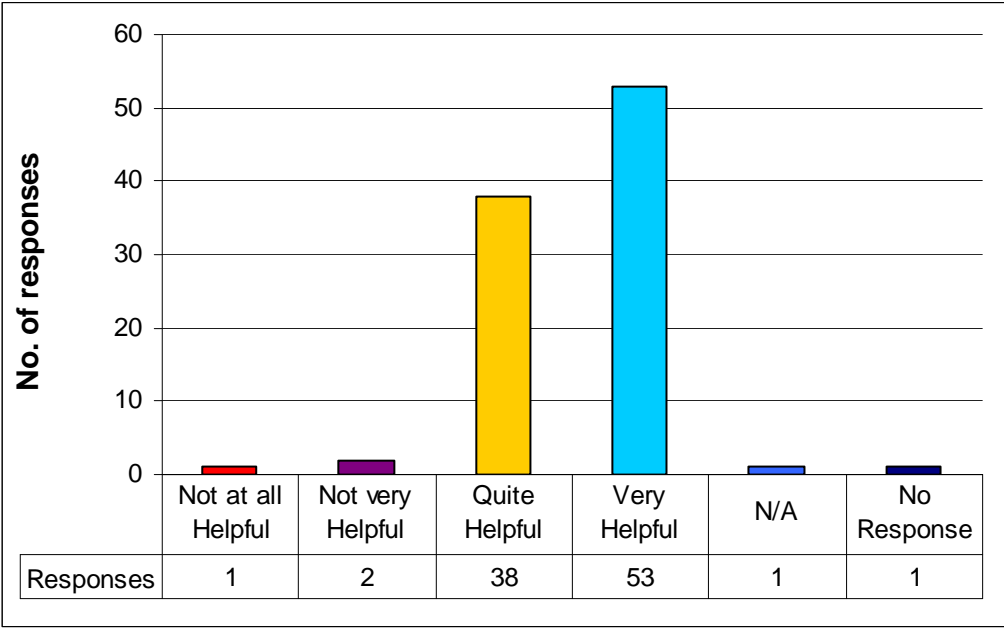
In the sample there were responses from 16 mothers, 12 fathers and 2 grandmothers.

6.2.5 Did any other professional talk to you about the information they would be sharing in the meeting?



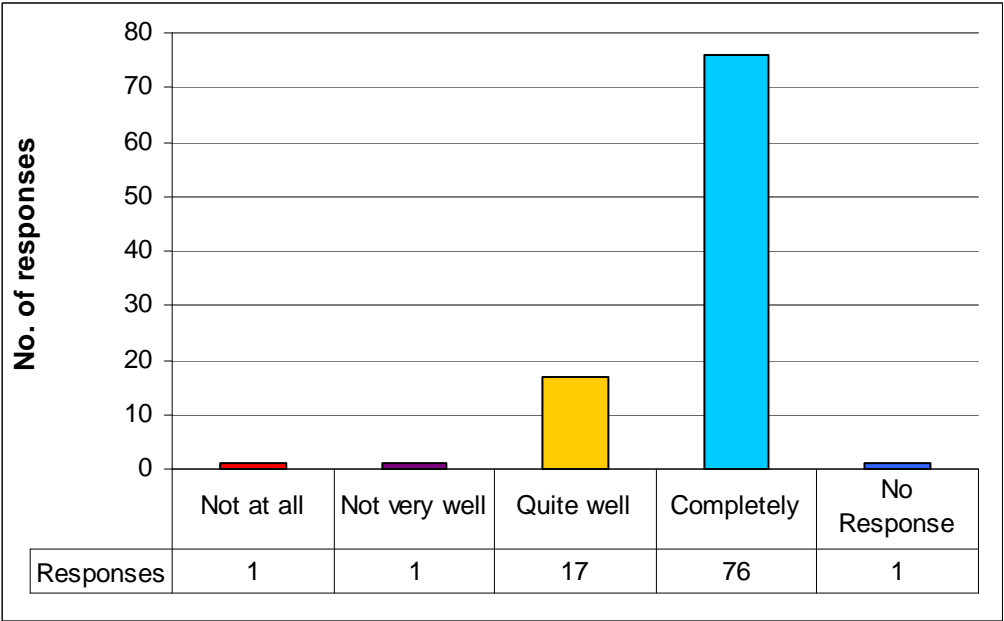
The analysis indicates that information sharing by social workers and others to prepare parents for child protection conferences is quite good, although there is potential for improvement in this area, with 22% of respondents indicating that professionals had not shared information with parents/grandparents before the conference.

6.2.6 Did it help to talk to the Chair before the meeting?



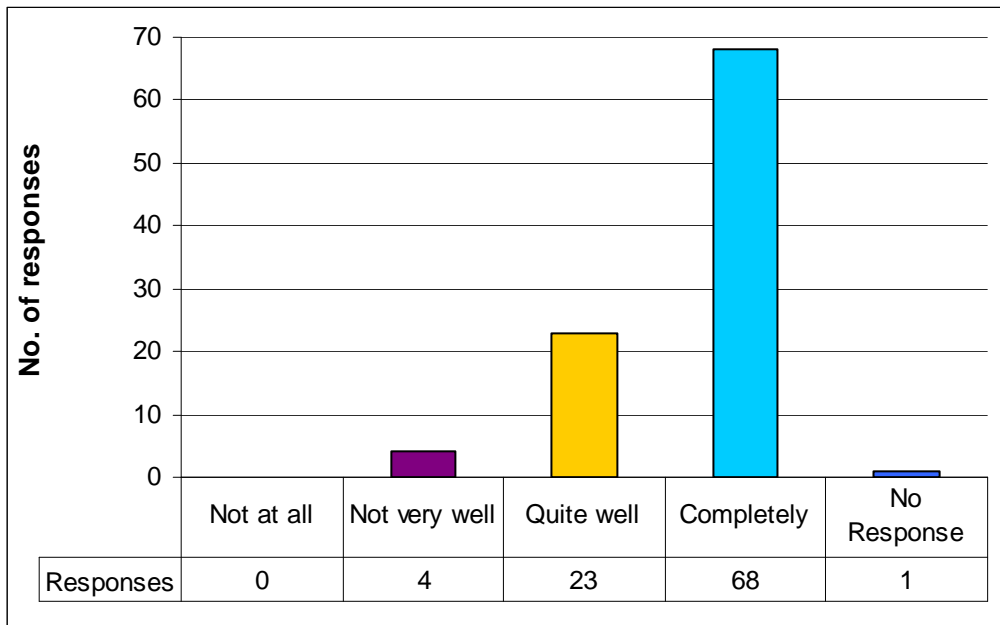
A very high proportion of the respondents, 91 out of 96, felt that the practice of meeting the Chair of the conference before the start of the meeting was helpful. This enables the Chair to explain the agenda for the meeting, help the parent or other adult to understand the concerns and how the meeting will be conducted to ensure the best and safest outcome for the child and family, to set clear expectations for behaviour and to prepare the adults to express their views and opinions in the meeting as well as possible. Similarly most appreciated the practice of taking parents into the conference room before the rest of the professionals.

6.2.7 Do you understand what needs to change to make things better for your child in the future?



Most positively there was a very strong response to the questions around the parents/grandparents understanding of the plan made at conference, with 93 saying that they understood quite well or completely what needed to change. This is a very important question, since parents and other adults in the family stand a far better chance of making the changes needed if they understand *what needs to change* and how.

6.2.8 Do you think the plan that was discussed in the meeting will help you to make these changes?



6.3 The number of respondents who felt that the plan was either quite or very helpful in helping them to make the necessary changes was 91 out of a total of 96. Again this is a very high proportion and is very encouraging in terms of the conference success in helping parents and family members to take on board and understand the seriousness of the concerns and the way in which they can be supported to keep their children safer in future.

6.4 There is still potential to increase the number of older children who can take a meaningful part in the Child Protection process. It is not always possible or appropriate to include children at the Initial Conference stage, partly due to the timescale not allowing for an advocate to be allocated and then to meet with and prepare the child. However this could be achieved more consistently with review conferences and older young people can have a valuable contribution to make in sharing their views about the child protection issues under discussion.

It is planned that now the feedback form from parents has been introduced and is being routinely offered to parents and other family members, Chairs will now start to share the feedback form for children and young people (see Appendix 6)

7.0 Administration of Child Protection and Looked After processes

In 2011 the administration support for the service transferred to the Business Services. The increase in LAC and CP numbers continues to place significant pressures on the capacity to deliver on the agreed timescales for production and circulation of minutes and ensuring timely recording on the Protocol system

7.1 Administration of Child Protection Conferences

Working Together to Safeguard Children 2010 (p 5.111) sets out the need to ensure that all” child protection conferences, both initial and review should have dedicated administrative person to take notes and produce a record of the meeting. The record of the conference is a crucial working document for all relevant professionals and the family”

7.1.1 In Coventry all child protection conferences are supported by experience minute taker. The increase in child protection plans have led to significant backlogs in producing a record of conferences. In 2010 the staffing capacity within the service was increased by 1 fulltime equivalent post and increased capacity within the team to 5.2 fte Minute Secretaries.

In recognition of the need to streamline and modernise our child protection processes, the service undertook a Lean Review in 2012 involving key stakeholders from the range of agencies involved in this work.

7.1.2 A comprehensive plan was agreed aimed at:

- Streamlining processes for child protection conferences
- Introducing the use of laptops to speed the production of minutes
- Developing standards to ensure a more consistent and concise standard of minutes
- More timely distribution of outcomes and minutes

7.1.3 Thematic chairing and minuting of conferences has been introduced, which enables more clarity of focus on the critical issues and a quicker production of child protection minutes. Over the last year the work aimed at the development of thematic chairing and minuting of conferences has progressed well and this practice has been embed across IROs and minuteing staff with clearly agreed standrds and timescles.

7.1.4 Most minuteing secretaries have been porvided with laptops, and all but one of them are able to use these routinely in meetings to take 'thematic' minutes which in most cases can be turned into completed minutes far more quickly than shorthand or longhand.

7.1.5 However in spite of this there remains a very considerable backlog of child protection minutes. During most of 2011 this was maintained at a level of around 120 sets of minutes, with the number outstanding at the end of December 2011 being 135. Throughout 2012 the backlog has increased rapidly, and currently, (August 2012) stands at 220. This has been due to a number of factors, including the very significant increase in the demand for child protection conferences over this period, a change in management arrangements for the child protection minute secretaries, the difficulty in recruiting suitably skilled and experienced staff who want to do this very challenging role, and some staffing issues, including long term sick leave.

7.1.6 The backlog of minutes has required a jointly agreed plan which is robustly monitored by operational managers on a weekly basis, and by the Leadership Teams of both the Children Learning and Young People's and Customer and Workforce Development Directorates

7.2 **Administrtaion of Looked After Reviews**

7.2.1 The IRO is responsible for completing a record of the review and ensuring that the record addresses all the issues required by the Care Planning Regulations and the IRO Handbook. The completion of the record of the review is completed by either by the recording the review on dictaphones which are then processed into word documents by the Business Centre or by the IRO themselves.

7.2.2 The guidance sets the following timescales for producing record of reviews:

1. The IRO should produce a written record of the decisions or recommendations made within five working days of the completion of the review.

In Coventry IROs meet this requirement for most reviews

2. The IRO should produce a full record of the review within 15 working days of the completion of the review.

The current caseloads of the IROs and capacity within the Business Services Centre have meant that we have not been able consistently meet this target

3. The full written record of the review, including the decisions, should be distributed within 20 working days of the completion of the review to all those who attend the review.

The current caseloads of the IROs and capacity within the Business Services Centre have meant that we have not been able consistently to meet this target

7.2.4 The ability to report on the three timescales has not been possible due to Protocol issues, but a reporting mechanism is being developed with the Information Management Team.

8.0 Other areas of work covered by the IRO Team

- The IROs provide a daily consultation service to advice and support to professionals across all agencies about child protection processes
- They provide advice and consultation on the guidance and systems around 'people in a position of trust' and convene the strategy meetings held under these processes.
- They represent Coventry Safeguarding Children Service at Multi Agency Public Protection meetings and at the Multi Agency Steering Panel for children missing from home and care.
- IROs regularly contribute to the child protection and Looked After children training and development.
- Performance Surgeries

9.0 Service Development Priorities for 2012-13

- Continuing to develop more robust and systematic data collection processes and reporting.
- Maintaining performance for timescales for child protection and looked after reviews

Target for CP – 100%
Target for LAC – 95%
- In line with the government drive to ensure that children in need of adoption and other forms of permanence are moved into permanent placements more quickly, IROs will focus on ensuring that care plans are progressed in a timely way and that Local Authority and Court processes for decision making are supported and challenged robustly where necessary.
- Focus on the Fundamental Service Review priorities and working with operational services and partners to deliver on
 - improving outcomes for children
 - securing permanence and adoption for children
 - safely reducing the number of children looked after
 - reducing delays for children
- The introduction of a Safeguarding performance 'dashboard' is under development and will provide helpful ongoing performance information. However difficulties in achieving good reporting on performance due to the complexity of the electronic recording systems continue to demand a high level of management input and time. Resolution of the recording and reporting issues will need to be a continued focus over the next 12 months if accurate performance reporting is to be achieved.

- Agreeing Quality Standards for the work of the IROs and developing a framework for regular reporting on this.
- Development of the Role of IRO in Safeguarding and Looked After Children Performance Surgeries.

9.0 Appendices

Appendix 1. Case examples

Appendix 2. Red Amber Green Looked After Care Plan Quality Assurance

Appendix 3. Regional IRO Pledge

Appendix 4. Report - Feedback from Parents on Child Protection Meetings

Celia East
Review and Quality Assurance Manager

Jivan Sembi
Head of Safeguarding

August 2012

Appendix 1 – CASE STUDIES

CASE STUDY 1

Escalation letter sent to Deputy Director re delays in agreeing funding for specialist psychiatric assessment for Catherine, aged 13

I am contacting you to raise my concern about the delay in decision making that occurred with regards funding of a specialist assessment, and the serious impact that this had on a very vulnerable Looked After young person, Catherine, with a request that consideration is given to the lessons learned in this case and how these can be taken forward in future to avoid this happening again.

Catherine was made the subject of a Secure Order on (date) on welfare grounds. She remained there for a number of months.

Whilst at the unit she seriously assaulted and injured another resident. Because of this an assessment of Catherine was needed that would inform both the exit plan based on her need and the sentencing exercise on the criminal side. A single judge presided over both the criminal matters and the Secure Order hearings.

2 assessments were completed. One was psychological and the other psychiatric. The experts agreed on the therapeutic need but had opposing views regarding the required placement type to manage risk from Catherine.

It was agreed at court that a forensic risk assessment was required. A joint Health and Local Authority panel was attended by CSC to seek funding. That panel saw the matter as a health need and recommended liaison with the Health commissioner. SW spent the next few weeks seeking an answer from health and eventually the court directed payment either via court parties or via their own funding. I can provide detail of the e mails and calls if that would be helpful but feel that the issue is wider than this incident itself.

As the independent reviewing officer I shared the concern of panel members at the secure criteria review and of Catherine herself about the lack of progress towards a move on from Secure caused by the delay in a decision being reached about funding of the assessment.

Catherine was being supported by an advocate from the Voice to make a complaint in her own right and I supported Catherine via liaison with her local advocate so that she could seek resolution to it. I understand now that Catherine has decided not to pursue the matter.

However I feel the matter should not pass without a cause for concern being raised at an appropriate level, and the points I am raising for your consideration are that:

- There was a period of dead time for Catherine when the assessment was not progressed and therefore an exit plan could not be agreed.
- She was in a secure unit with restrictions on her liberty and not getting an answer about the funding of an assessment was causing her to stay there longer than she needed to.

- It is my understanding that the cost of the forensic risk assessment was in the region of 2.5K whereas the weekly cost of a stay at the secure unit was in the region of 7K. Even a week's delay being avoided would have made more financial sense but more importantly it would have been a week less in a secure unit for a 13 year old child.

Based on the above I would ask that you consider:

Is there an agreement that can be made so that when assessments are required for children that are in a secure setting the respective budget holders from the relevant agencies come to a decision about funding stream more quickly?

Case Study 2.

IRO Action to Promote the Wishes of a Young Person re Adam aged 16

Adam is 16 years old and has been in residential care in Coventry for a year following systematic rejection and emotional abuse by his mother and stepfather.

Despite refusing to care for her son, Adam 's mother made attempts to disrupt his placement, making repeated complaints to, and unreasonable demands of the LA and his carers.

In December 2011, Adam's family sold the family home and moved to another part of the country making no contact with Adam or the Local Authority about their plans and leaving no forwarding address.

This was an extremely distressing time for Adam who was in the process of sitting exams and was concerned about his future.

Adam was in contact with the IRO at this time in respect of placement issues, but also expressed concern about his legal situation given his mother's 'abandonment'. He was anxious about the rights his mother still had to affect his life and whether he could now choose to restrict information given to her.

The IRO sought detailed written legal advice on Adam's behalf and met with him to share this and discuss implications/options open to him. After consideration by Adam, a way forward re information sharing/ mothers potential involvement in future decision making was agreed formally within the LAC Review, which was then implemented by the SW.

Adam was happy with the outcome.

Case Study 3

P and R,

P, aged 5 and R, aged 2, are two little girls placed at home with their father on full Care Orders. There are a number of older children who had been permanently removed from parent's care due to neglect and who had plans of long-term fostering. P was born during the care proceedings for her older siblings.

Both parents were assessed in a residential unit in relation to their ability to parent P. The outcome of the care proceedings for P was that she should remain at home on a full Care Order but with father as the sole carer. Parents could remain as a couple but Father was to be responsible for all P's care. When R was born it became clear that Mother's mental health had deteriorated and she was having hallucinations that she was at risk from those close to her. This resulted in physical attacks against her partner and potentially the children. As a result R was made the subject of a Care Order. The court ordered that she and P remain at home with Father so long as Mother was not part of the family and that any contact with Mother was supervised by Social Care. Mother's mental health has been unstable for many years but since R's birth she had been 'sectioned' on several occasions. There were strong suspicions that Father was allowing unsupervised contact between mother and the children and concerns about his standards of care. As a result, the Local Authority and IRO had strong reservations about the court care plan, feeling that it may continue to place the children at some risk of significant harm. However this case had been presented to the court on more than one occasion and the court had made it clear that the Local Authority should continue to work on these children being maintained at home with their father.

Concerns raised by IRO in the formal Management Alert:

The IRO felt that, despite the court's disposal, Father's care was not good enough – he was not co-operating with the working agreement, not demonstrating an understanding of concerns that professionals had about the children being neglected and put at risk, the home conditions were very poor, the children received very little attention or stimulation, and it was suspected that Father was letting Mother see the children when Social Care were not present.

The risk of unsupervised contact with Mother was particularly concerning for a number of reasons:

- Because of the risk of the children being caught up in domestic violence between parents,
- Because Mother may have hallucinations and/or negative feelings towards the children and act upon them
- The impact Mother's low mood can have on the children, e.g. she may reject them emotionally.

In addition the home conditions would have a direct impact upon their emotional and social development as well as on them not reaching their academic potential.

A further perceived risk was that Social Care was at the point of transferring the case from the Neighbourhood team to the LAC Team. The family including extended

family were well known to the neighbourhood office. The social worker (and team) had a good working knowledge of the extended family, the child protection risks associated with the family, its history and dynamics. The IRO was concerned that to transfer the case at this point would have made it easier for parents to avoid monitoring and also to have misled any worker taking over.

Outcomes

This alert caused considerable discussion and negotiation as the Local Authority view was that the court had made a decision regarding where the children should reside and lengthy work over years with this family had not achieved any consistent improvement. However this was resolved to the IRO's satisfaction by the Local Authority putting in place a tighter working agreement with father, with increased and stricter monitoring, and the case remaining in the district for an additional six months to ensure the changes were well embedded before the case was transferred to a new worker and team.

In addition Pulse was commissioned for a three month period to do spot checks. The house was cleaned from top to bottom, carpets were cleaned and Father decorated the home. R was attending nursery everyday, there had been no reports of Mother and the children meeting up between reviews (5 month period) and the view of the social worker was that Father was working with the working agreement.

The plan is that if Father can maintain a good enough level of care for the children over a prolonged period of time, e.g. 12 - 18 months, and continues to cooperate with social care then the Care Order could be revoked. The appropriateness of the children's legal status will be considered at every review and the view of the IRO is that he would not want these children to remain at home on a full CO indefinitely.

Case Study 4

Independent Review Officer Management Alert Form

STAGES 1 – 6

Date of Alert:	28/6/12	
From :	Independent Reviewing Officer	
To:	Team manager, ISM, Head of Service	
Stage	Responsible Officer	Tick as appropriate
Stage 1:	Team Manager	x
Stage 2:	Integrated Service Manager	x
Stage 3:	Head of Service	x
Stage 4:	Assistant Director, Children's Social Care	
Stage 5:	Director of Children, Learning and Young People	
Stage 6:	Chief Executive of the Council	
At each stage a formal response is expected within 5 working days		
Name of Child: R x7	DOB:	
Social Worker:	Team:	
SW/ Line Manager:		
<u>Summary of concern(s)</u>		
<p>As you are aware the above has been a high profile case within Court proceedings, with Colin Green making the final decision in respect of the children's permanent term placement plans. After lengthy deliberations by the caseholding team, the LAC Review and relevant Panels about the option of adoption, it was finally decided that the children would be placed permanently within long term foster care.</p> <p>I need to make you aware that I am raising a formal IRO alert in respect of this case in view of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• After very significant delay within the court proceedings, although the Care Plan was clarified in March, I understand that there has been no action to seek long term placements for 4 of the children or assessing the long term potential of the current foster carers for the other three. This would appear to be despite the case having been co- worked by the LAC and neighbourhood team since January 2012. The LAC Review on 2/3/12 and transfer summary of 28/3/12 recommended urgent homefinding actions to be undertaken has yet		

to be actioned.

- I understand that contact between the children has recently become problematic and is no longer being promoted by the foster carers. Given that the sibling relationship was the key determinant for Colin Green in rejecting an adoption plan for the younger children, this is of great concern. The specialist sibling report by Shelagh Beckett gives very clear information/ guidance about contact needed.
- There would not appear to be clarity about the placement planning for the 4 placed together despite the lengthy sibling report by Shelagh Beckett and long deliberations about appropriate long term placement combinations. S's reported wish currently not to live with her siblings should not deflect the focus from the previous assessment of sibling needs.
- The previously reported possibility of the current foster carers of the 3 other children offering SGO now appears to be ruled out and there are reported to be strains within the placement. It has been reported that the carers have recently given notice in respect of another placement of several years duration. This would not inspire confidence in the long term security for the children in this placement - given that D is only 3, this is obviously of great concern.

Request Action

LAC Reviews scheduled for this week for all 7 children have been postponed for 2 weeks to allow for urgent action to be taken to progress the above. In particular I will be looking for:

1. Confirmation that the sibling placement planning for the group of 4 currently placed together is clear.
2. Long term referrals to homefinding/placements have been made for them
3. Feedback from placements/homefinding re timescale is available to the Review
4. Confirmation that assessment for long term status of the carers for the younger three has been requested and a timescale for completion
5. Confirmation of the action planned to address sibling contact in view of the current difficulties.

I am seeking your support in order to address the drift in this case and ensure that the casework planning is clear.

As all of the children are placed in agency foster placements, I do not feel it is appropriate to seek placement planning/homefinding input to the Review from agency fostering staff. Representation/input from Coventry FPS would be extremely helpful.

Response by Social Worker and Practice Manager

Date:

Resolution of Alert (recorded by IRO)

Date:

If not resolved progress to:

<i>Stage 2</i>	
<i>Stage 3</i>	
<i>Stage 4</i>	
<i>Stage 5</i>	
<i>Stage 6</i>	

Case Study 5 – Professional practice issues.

Escalation of concerns about professional standards of practice by the IRO to the Integrated Service Manager

I have had to bring to your notice within one week 3 Red RAG notifications for LAC reviews for three separate children where there has been an absence of statutory visiting , partial or no engagement with the cases , and no up to date or absent Pathway Plans ; all over a period since this worker took over of the case.

Additionally the main carer or residential professionals in all three cases report poor or largely absent communication from this worker.

As this situation is unprecedented in my experience , this email is to formally alert to you that under our escalation procedures within the required 10 days, I understand that there is a requirement for a meeting between the ISM, TM , Review and QA manager and myself to look at a way forward in this matter .

I would appreciate your views and I will be in touch to try and convene such a meeting .

Following this communication formal processes were instituted with the member of staff and additional supervision put in place to address the concerns raised. The IRO has reported that the workers performance has improved markedly and her contribution to Looked After Reviews has been greatly improved to the point where another IRO has recently sent her a compliment. The worker's manager has expressed her appreciation of the IRO's effective escalation of this issue, which enable her to address it very effectively and the worker has been able to improve his performance, professionalism and the quality of his work with young people.

Appendix 3. Regional IRO Pledge

Appendix 4. Report - Feedback from Parents on Child Protection Meetings

SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN SERVICE			
QUALITY ASSURANCE RAG NOTIFICATION RECOGNITION OF EXCELLENT PRACTICE			
CHILD/YP Name:	CASE NO*		
*This is the 'case number' from the 'Personal' tab in the child's record on Protocol. The case number can be in one of three formats, e.g. 4120389A or CCC000054405PER or 43235			
Name of Allocated Worker: Qualified SW <input type="checkbox"/> Unqualified caseholder <input type="checkbox"/>	Team Manager: Team		
IRO	Date of Looked After Review		
RAG status of this LAC Care Plan	Red		
	Amber		
	Green		
Recognition of Excellent Practice	<input type="checkbox"/>		

The IRO must select **one** of the following notifications for each Looked After Review and tick the relevant issues of concern. Where appropriate add detail in the comments section. One or more concerns within the selected Notification can be ticked as necessary. The IRO will then make arrangements to progress the concerns identified, as detailed below.

Red:

- Serious Concerns are identified about the quality of Care planning leading to serious drift or delay, and/or
- Statutory requirements have not been met, and
- Immediate action is required to address this.

Amber: Concerns exist that require priority intervention to address the delay in the care plan and/or address unacceptable consultation / working together arrangements with child / parent or professionals.

Green: Care planning is progressing appropriately and Review decisions are being actioned in a timely way that meet the child's assessed needs.

Red	Tick	Details
No Looked After Care Plan on Protocol	<input type="checkbox"/>	
No Pathway Plan on Protocol	<input type="checkbox"/>	
No permanence option secured by 3 rd Review	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Serious delays in care planning.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Minimum numbers of recommended actions from the last LAC review have been progressed, leading to drift.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Concerns that the placement is not meeting the child/young persons needs and there is no plan to address this.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
No evidence of promoting participation of children or young people in the care planning.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
No evidence of promoting participation of parents/carers in the care planning.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Statutory visits not undertaken within the required timescales.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
No PEP by the second review.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
No Health plan by the second review.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Complex case allocated to unqualified case holder / or the case is unallocated	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Child not seen or consulted with by Social Worker or representative from Social Care since last LAC review.	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Action Required – IRO must select one of the following options:

- This notification has been passed to the responsible Social Worker/Team Manager/ISM requiring a response from SW and TM within 2 weeks.
- The IRO will review the response with the social worker / team manager within 3 weeks of this date to discuss the progress of these issues.

If progress is limited, the IRO Management Alert will be triggered.

If a second Red notification is given at the next review, the IRO Management Alert will be triggered. In this case the IRO is to meet with SW and TM/ISM and alert Head of Service. Actions and timescales agreed will be reported to the IRO, ISM and Head of Service.

- A LAR will be arranged within three months of this date to review the progress of this care plan with specific focus on the issues of concerns identified. **This meeting will review the existing RAG rating.** If clear evidence is provided that the concern has been fully addressed, the IRO may decide to revert to the statutory timescale for the next LAR.

Amber	Tick	Details
No Permanence Option at 2 nd Review	<input type="checkbox"/>	
A single-track plan for Permanency was agreed at last LAR and Home Finding / Long-Term Linking has not progressed.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
No Social Worker report for the Review meeting	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Key recommendations of the care plan have not been progressed and responsibility for action lies with: <input type="checkbox"/> A partner agency <input type="checkbox"/> Legal Services	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Change of Social Worker/Case transfer is / has contributed to drift in the progress of care plan.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Young Person is not happy in placement – although it is evident that his/her needs are being met.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Child/Young Person/Parent/Carer wished to make a complaint	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Lack of progress with pathway/transition planning, (including UASC).	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Lack of legal security (including UASC)	<input type="checkbox"/>	
No Health plan within 28 days of placement.	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Action Required – IRO to select one of the following options:

- This notification has been passed to the responsible Social Worker/Team Manager/ISM requiring a response from SW and TM within 2 weeks
- IRO will require a written update from the SW on the progress of the issues of concerns within 3 months of this date.

If a second Amber notification is given at the next review and progress remains limited, the IRO will consider initiating the IRO Management Alert.

Green	Tick	Details
Case is well managed and care planning is progressing.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
At second LAR a permanence option is identified	<input type="checkbox"/>	
All recommendations from the last LAC review have been addressed	<input type="checkbox"/>	
The care plan is meeting the child/young person's holistic needs.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Evidence of active participation of child/young person being promoted in the care planning process	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Evidence of active participation of parent/family being promoted in the care planning process	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Review of arrangements paper work has been consistently presented to reviews and updated on PROTOCOL	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<p><u>Recognition of Excellent Practice</u> IRO may send 'Recognition of Excellent Practice' Notification if practice is of exceptionally high quality.</p>		

Action Required

- This notification has been passed to the responsible Social Worker/Team Manager/ ISM .
- IRO will arrange a LAR within the required time scales to discuss progress of the care plan in the multi-agency forum as required.

This meeting will review the existing RAG rating.

Looked After Care Plan Protocol

IRO Management Alert

1.0 Introduction and Legislative Framework

- 1.1 *Section 26 of the Children Act 1989* and the associated guidance and regulations recommended that Looked After Children's reviews should be chaired by officers of the local authority who are at a more senior level than the case-holding social workers. The intention was to bring a degree of objectivity and oversight to practice and decision-making for children in care, and to monitor the activity of the local authority as a corporate parent.
- 1.2 *Section 118 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002* amended section 26 of the Children Act 1989 to make the **Independent Reviewing Officer's** role a legal requirement in Looked After Children's reviews. Statutorily, IROs must participate in the review of children's cases, monitor the authority's functions in respect of the review, and may refer a child's case to the **Children and Family Court Advisory Service (CAFCASS)** if the failure to implement aspects of a care plan might be considered in breach of the *child's human rights*. *CAFCASS has the power to undertake legal action.*
- 1.3 As with all the IRO's responsibilities and powers, the power to refer a case to CAFCASS applies to all Looked After Children, including those **Looked After** under a voluntary agreement (*section 20 of the Children Act 1989*) and those Looked After under a **Care Order** (*section 31 of the Children Act 1989*). Such legal proceedings might be further family proceedings (for example, for the discharge of a care order or for contact), a freestanding application under the *Human Rights Act 1998*, or an application for judicial review.
- 1.4 **One of the IRO's key roles within this framework is in dispute resolution in cases where they have identified that the care plan for a child is not being progressed in a timely way to meet the child's needs or where there is poor practice impacting on the child's needs being met. In these situations, the IRO has the duty to negotiate with the local authority management up to the highest level, and ultimately to refer the case to CAFCASS if they believe this process has not resulted in the desired outcome. This protocol addresses this escalation process.**
- 1.5 Wherever possible, the IRO will attempt to resolve a problem concerning the child's care plan by negotiation, including contacting the team responsible for the child and attempting to resolve the problem directly with the team. If this proves unsuccessful, the IRO will take the case to senior management, then the Assistant Director, the Director, the Chief Executive. Where necessary the IRO may refer to CAFCASS. The IRO will also work with the local authority complaints officers and advocates where necessary for the resolution of a problem.

2.0 The Purpose of the IRO Management Alert and sets out a clear pathway for communication between the IRO and the child's allocated social worker and their management, to ensure that satisfactory resolution of concerns is achieved without delay

2.1 This protocol aims to promote good practice, attempting to minimise any time delay for the child/young person but hopefully ensuring a fair time frame for the LA to review and consider its decisions. The process for seeking problem resolution is set in stages. The time frames stated should be seen as setting minimum standards and every opportunity for taking less than the proposed times should be encouraged.

2.1.1 The maximum time taken for problem resolution within the authority should be no more than 3 months. The proposed timescales are maximum timescales and the IRO may set earlier timescales for each component of the process if they feel that this is necessary to achieve resolution in a timescale that meets the child's needs.

The Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) will make a decision about the timescale in which the problem should be resolved and make this clear to the operational managers at each stage of the resolution process.

The **IRO** and/or the Team Manager may wish to discuss the issues informally with their local **CAFCASS Manager** and the **IRO** may wish to seek independent legal advice at any stage of the process. The Local Authority will be expected to acquire funding for this.

2.1.2 This protocol will provide a clear and agreed quality assurance framework for;

- To provide information about the status and quality of care planning for all LAC and to act as a management monitoring tool for QA purpose
- The recognition and acknowledgement of good practice
- A clear process for the escalation and resolution of concerns about poor practice
- To provide Managers with information where there are concerns about the quality of practice or other issues of poor practice impacting on the child's needs being met, serious drift or delays in implementing plans for children subject to looked after processes
- To make the process more robust and objective

2.2 Recognition of Good Practice Notification

A recognition of good practice will be issued via the **quality assurance RAG notification** when there is evidence of excellence in the practice / management of plans for children looked after. Such practice may be characterised by:

- Clear, Timely, and Comprehensive Case/Care Plans being progressed effectively

- Effective relationships with children and young people
- Effective relationships with parents and carers
- Significant Foresight/Effort in progressing complex issues and Care Plans
- Responsibility and Ownership in practice
- Quality/Comprehensive information systems

2.3 Where there is evidence of **excellent practice**/management of Care/Plans the IRO will send a 'Recognition of Good Practice' notification to the Social Worker, copied to the ISM and to the complaints officer.

3.0 Coventry IRO Management Alert Process

3.1 This is separate from the RAG rating of care plans. The IRO Care planning Escalation process in Coventry is known as the "IRO management alert process". An IRO management alert will be issued when there is evidence that there is drift or delay in implementation of care or pathway plans; i.e. they are not being progressed within appropriate timescales, or when there is evidence of poor quality service to service users, particularly when this impacts on the needs of the LAC being met appropriately.

3.2 Situations where an IRO might have concerns and initiate the management alert process would include:

- Issues around the appropriateness of the LA's proposed care plan
- Serious delays in care planning e.g. permanency or pathway plans not progressing
- Care Proceedings or Permanency Plans not initiated in a timely manner
- Looked After Review recommendations not followed through
- Lack of adequate preparation for the Looked After Review
- Lack of completion of decisions within timescales
- Failure to initiate services and assessments as required in the care plan
- Statutory visits not undertaken within required timescales
- Appropriate Contact Plans not being formulated/enacted
- Failure to follow anti-oppressive principles
- Lack of or poor supervision of a Social Worker

- Concerns about allocation history
- Delays in family finding/placement search
- Inadequate health provision
- Inadequate education provision
- Evidence of poor placement choice/standard of care
- Little or no evidence of management discussion or direction in agreeing / steering Care plans
- Lack of, or inappropriate engagement/communication with child / young person
- Lack of, or inappropriate engagement/communication with parents /carer / partner agencies
- Regular failure to meet recommended Plan timescales/tasks
- Clear lack of basic case or procedural knowledge/competence
- Absence or ongoing inadequacy of information systems.

3.3 When an IRO identifies that there are **concerns** about planning or practice which warrant an IRO Management Alert, the following process will be triggered.

There are six stages to the escalation process within the Local Authority. The IRO has the discretion to proceed directly to stage 3 in more serious or urgent cases. The stages are:

Stage	Responsible Officer
Stage 1:	Team Manager
Stage 2:	ISM
Stage 3:	Head of Service
Stage 4:	Assistant Director, Children's Social Care
Stage 5:	Director of Children and Young People Service
Stage 6:	Chief Executive of the Council

At any stage in this process the IRO may refer the concerns to CAFCASS if the issues indicate a serious breach of the child's HR. The IRO will always consult with the Head of Safeguarding and the relevant Head of Service before making a referral to CAFCASS.

3.3.1 Stage 1

At the end of every statutory review, the **IRO** will identify a set of decisions which were formulated within the review meeting, determine the timescales for each decision to be completed and identify those decisions that are of sufficient concern to warrant notification by the social worker to the IRO of completion.

These are known as 'starred' recommendations. **IRO** to notify the **Team Manager** of every starred recommendation made. Starred recommendations should not be used lightly and this 'star status' should be crucial to the care plan and/or crucial to the child/young person's needs.

Star status can be considered in 3 categories:

1. **Implementation of Significant action within the Care Plan**
2. **Accessing resources**
3. **Inadequate / poor practice**

IRO produces 'starred' decisions with clear timescales for completion

IRO electronically forwards the decisions to the **Allocated Worker**, the **Team Manager** and the **Integrated Service Manager** within 72 hours (three days)

The IRO must submit the relevant form (please see appendix) to initiate stages 1 - 3 of the Care Planning Escalation Process. At each of these stages, a response is required within 5 working days of receipt.

- 3.3.2 Stages 4 - 6 will be managed through a meeting, which should be chaired by the Manager who has received the alert. The meeting should be independently minuted. All key personnel should be invited to the meeting. The IRO does not attend the meeting but is required to provide a statement of what would be required to prevent the matter progressing to the next dispute resolution stage.
- 3.3.3 Should the IRO exhaust all stages of the dispute process (or deem that the time it is taking to exhaust the stages is unreasonable) and (s)he believes there is still a danger that the child's human rights may be being breached due to action or inaction of the local authority, (s)he may make a section 118

referral to CAFCASS. CAFCASS is able to bring legal proceedings to achieve a remedy.

- 3.3.4 Legal proceedings should only be considered as a last resort - i.e., in extreme cases where all other attempts to resolve the problem have failed. The additional delay associated with legal proceedings is not in the interest of the child, and every effort should be made to resolve the problem before such action is taken.

3.4 Referral to CAFCASS

- 3.4.1 These guidelines are not designed to hinder or minimise concerns. However, given the impact on the Department should the management alert process reach the referral to **CAFCASS** stage, it is crucial that there is clear and transparent evidence of the IRO management and supervision process for senior managers, the Chief Executive, and/or members.

This procedure should be followed in a way that is proportionate to the level of concerns raised.

In exceptional circumstances, where the concern is about an extremely serious level of delay in planning or drift the Safeguarding Service may take the decision to escalate the concern to the Head of Service, or above and/or CAFCASS at an earlier point in the process, to seek resolution of the issues in as effective and timely a way as possible.

If this decision is taken the Integrated Service Manager and Head of Service should be informed in writing of the intention to do this.

- 3.4.2 Except in the exceptional circumstances outlined above, the IRO should only make the referral to CAFCASS if:
1. The IRO has made every attempt to resolve the problem with the local authority, up to the level of the Chief Executive, and there is still a risk of the child's human rights being breached.
 2. There is no other suitable adult able and willing to take the case on the child's behalf (when the child is under age 18) or the child is not of sufficient age and understanding and wanting to bring proceedings on their own behalf.
- 3.4.3 Where the child brings proceedings on his or her own behalf, the role of the IRO is only to assist the child in obtaining their own legal advice from a suitably qualified and experienced lawyer. Where a suitable adult brings proceedings on behalf of the child, the role of the IRO is only to establish that this is done.
- 3.4.4 Where the child is not in a position to initiate proceedings on their own behalf, no adult is able or willing to do so on their behalf, and where there is a risk of

the child's human rights being breached, the IRO should refer the matter to CAFCASS Legal at the following address:

CAFCASS Legal
8th floor, Wyndham House
South Quay Plaza
189 Marsh Wall
London
E14 9SH

Telephone: 020 7510-7000
Email: legal@cafcass.gov.uk
CAFCASS website

There is a duty lawyer each working day.

3.5 Recording and Communicating that a Child's Care Plan has been Subject to Alerts

- 3.5.1 The IRO should verbally inform the members of a child's **Looked After Review** meeting of any management alerts they have initiated since the previous meeting or which they intend to initiate subsequent to the current meeting. The IRO should record details of any prior management alerts in the Background and Update section of the discussion summary in the Chair's Report. The IRO should record details of any intended future alerts in the Legal section of the discussion summary of the Chair's Report.
- 3.5.2 The IRO should place all Management Alert forms on the relevant LAC file. The IRO should also ensure that it is recorded in the case notes section of Protocol that (s)he has initiated a management alert and how and when it is resolved, and that the Management Alert form is recorded on Protocol.
- 3.5.3 The Review and Quality Assurance Manager of the Service will report on the number of management alerts that have been initiated and the timescales for resolving them. This information will be included in the annual IRO Management Report.

3.6 Informing the IRO of any Significant Change in the Child's Circumstances

- 3.6.1 Under the Adoption and Children Act 2002 IRO Guidance (Regulation 8), the Local Authority must inform the IRO of, "Any significant change of circumstances occurring after the review that affects arrangements".

This is not an exhaustive list but the following changes should be communicated by the case holder to IROs in Coventry

1. Significant delays in completing any child care review decisions

2. Any period of more than three days missing from care (minutes of any missing from care meetings should also be forwarded to the IRO)
3. Unplanned or unexpected changes in the child's placement provision (which may significantly impact on placement stability)
4. Court Orders and outcomes from Directions hearings
5. Outcomes from LAC or medical consultations that identify/confirm any serious previously undiagnosed conditions
6. Planned and unplanned discharges from care
7. Outcomes of Joint Agency Panels
8. Outcomes of presentations to the Fostering Panel
9. Outcomes of presentations to the Adoption and Permanency Panel
10. Change of placements, including the relevant Ofsted report if it is a residential provision
11. Updates of Adoptions Action Plans
12. Any period of exclusion from school for more than five days
13. Unexpected changes in the child's family circumstances (births, deaths, etc.)
14. Arrests, bail, and convictions
15. Serious accidents
16. Changes of allocated social workers
17. Unplanned proposed or actual discharge from care
18. Complaints from or on behalf of the child, parent, or carer

3.6.2 As a result of receiving any of the above information, the IRO may decide to convene a review at an earlier date than was scheduled. The 2010 Care Planning regulations intend to strengthen the IRO role by specifying that a review must be held before any change in the **Care Plan** can be carried out.

3.6.3 Following on from this requirement, Coventry has identified four circumstances under which a change in the Care Plan cannot take place before a review meeting is held and the change has been endorsed by the IRO:

1. Wherever there is a proposal (which has not already been endorsed by the IRO) for the child to move from a regulated placement (e.g. foster care or children's home) to an unregulated placement (e.g. a semi-independent unit or "independent living" facility) before the age of 18.

2. Wherever any unplanned change is proposed to a child's accommodation that could significantly disrupt his or her education (e.g. having to move school during the academic year or during a programme leading to recognised qualifications such as during the run up to GCSEs in years 10 and 11).
3. Wherever there is a proposal to move a child from a placement in residential care where reports have previously indicated that the placement is appropriate and the child is settled and going to school.
4. Prior to a child being discharged from a secure children's home or leaving custody.

3.7 The Role of the Review & Quality Assurance Manager and Head of Safeguarding during the Management Alert Process

The Review & Quality Assurance Manager is responsible for management and supervision of the IROs.

3.7.1 The role of these managers during the management alert process shall be:

- To provide clear supervision to the IRO, taking into consideration the issue being raised and providing feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of the case being brought forward.
- To ensure that throughout the process, lines of communication remain open and clear and that the issue does not become clouded, personalised, or lost in other processes.
- To ensure that meetings take place on time and that they are present at all relevant meetings above the ISM level.
- To provide briefing to senior managers as to the view of the SCS on the issue being raised and possible routes to resolving the issue.
- To ensure that legal advice has been sought by the IRO from the Legal department at the appropriate time; to discuss this advice in supervision and consider its possible implications for the issue being raised.
- Overall, to encourage resolution prior to the issue reaching the ISM stage.

Pledge to Looked After Children and Young People

from Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Services in the West Midlands



As IROs, we will:

1 Be a consistent person in the life of children and young people and make sure their diverse needs are met; and make sure they know who their IRO is and how to contact them

2 Make sure that children and young people and appropriate others are informed about what IROs are for and what we will do

3 Enhance our relationship with our young people, get to know them better and see them more often, being creative in the approaches we use to communicate with them

4 Respond to individual needs, including the least possible intrusion into young people's personal lives

5 Ensure children and young people understand their care plan, and use jargon free language

6 Empower children and young people to participate more as they develop and learn, specifically with regard to charring reviews

7 Proactively challenge and make sure that what is agreed is done, and will take up issues on behalf of children and young people and make sure we feed back to them

8 Ensure children and young people's views are reflected in the review process and that we are not distracted from their wishes and feelings

9 Make the review process a positive experience by considering children and young people's wishes

10 Recognise the review is not just an event but part of an ongoing process

11 Make sure that children and young people know their rights including how to comment, compliment, or complain if they are not happy

12 Prioritise contact issues, including with friends and will make sure that contact is fun as well as safe

13 Compliment our children and young people at every opportunity and celebrate their successes

As IRO Managers, we will:

14 Strive to achieve appropriate resources, workload, caseload, admin support and necessary tools in place to help IROs meet quality assurance requirements.

15 Seek to empower the IROs in our services so that they can confidently complete their duties

ADCS

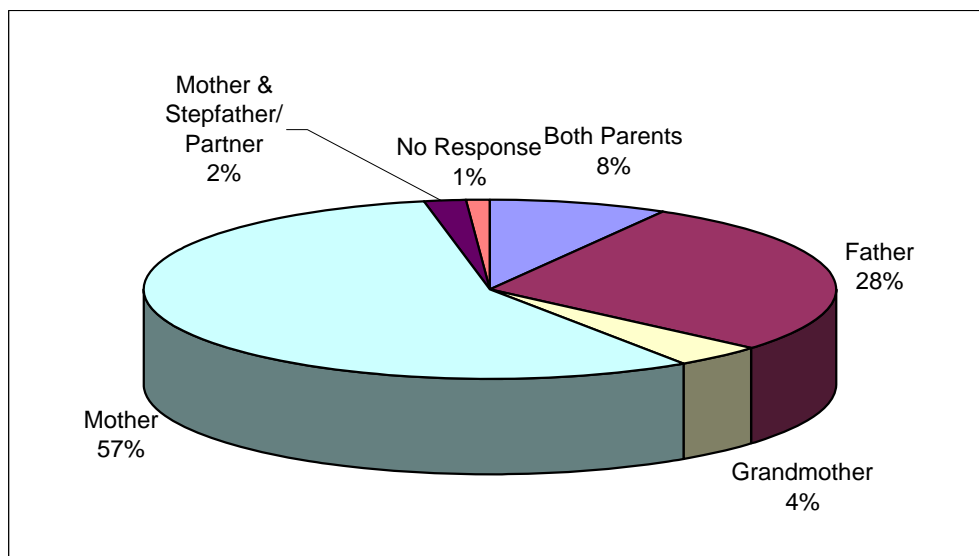
Leading Children's Services

Improvement and Efficiency
West Midlands

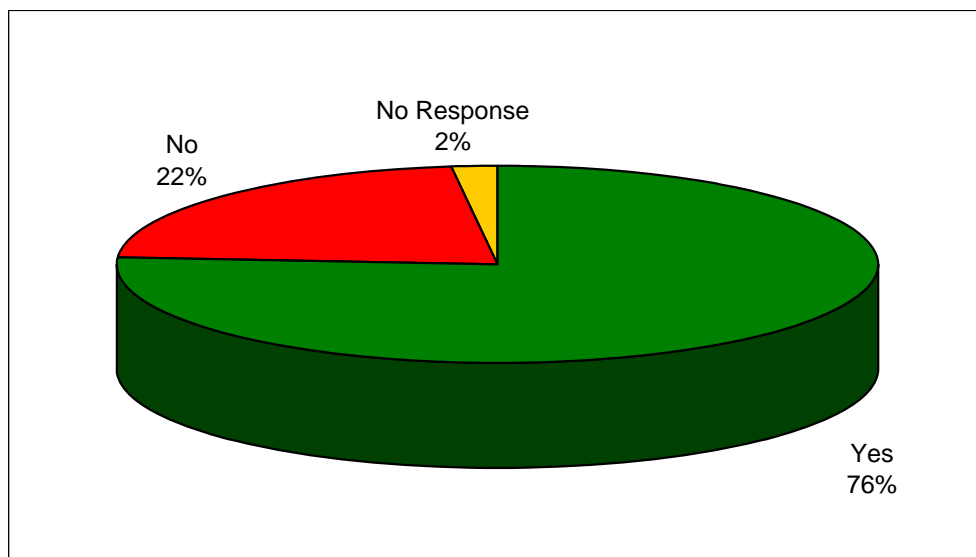
Coventry Safeguarding Children Board Post-Conference Questionnaire for Parent/Guardian

Summary of questionnaire responses (96 in total)

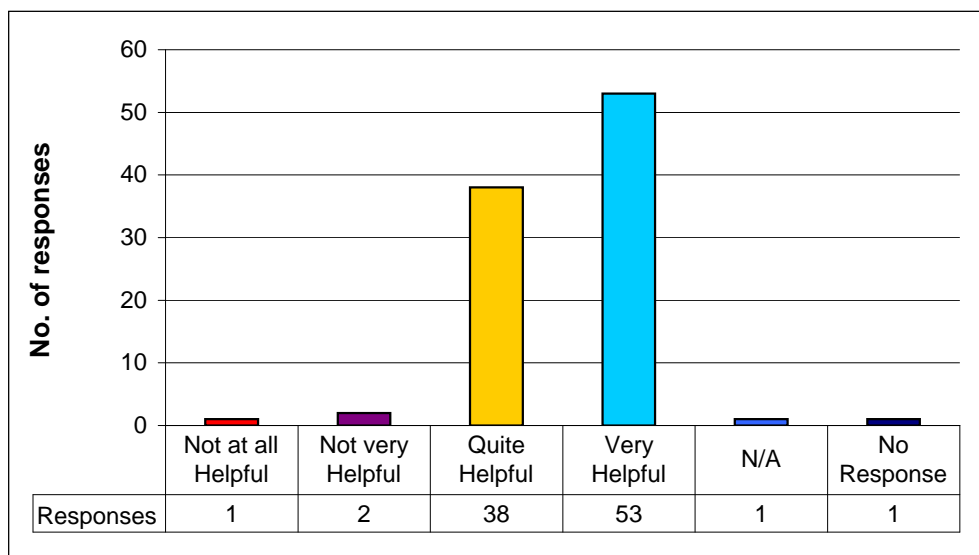
1. What is your relationship to the Child?



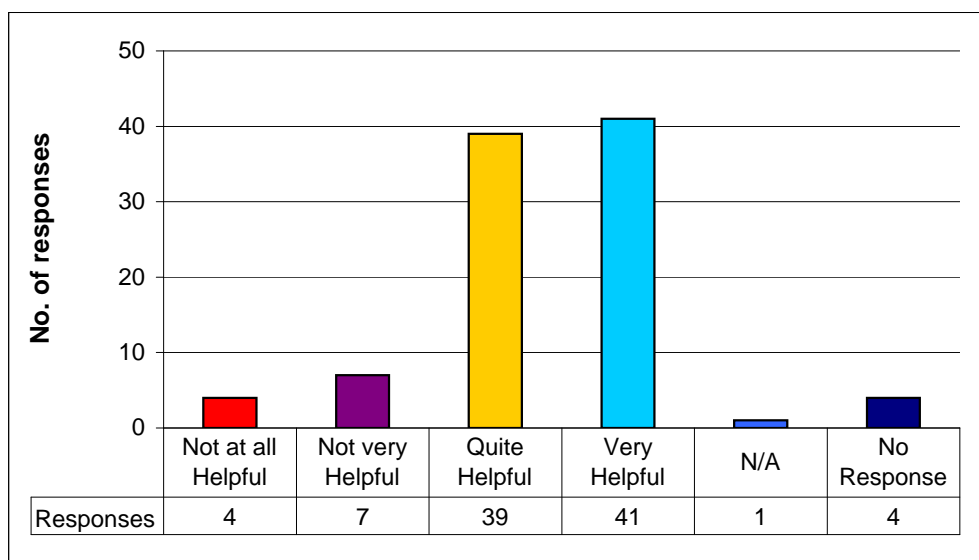
2. Did any other professional talk to you about the information they would be sharing in the meeting?



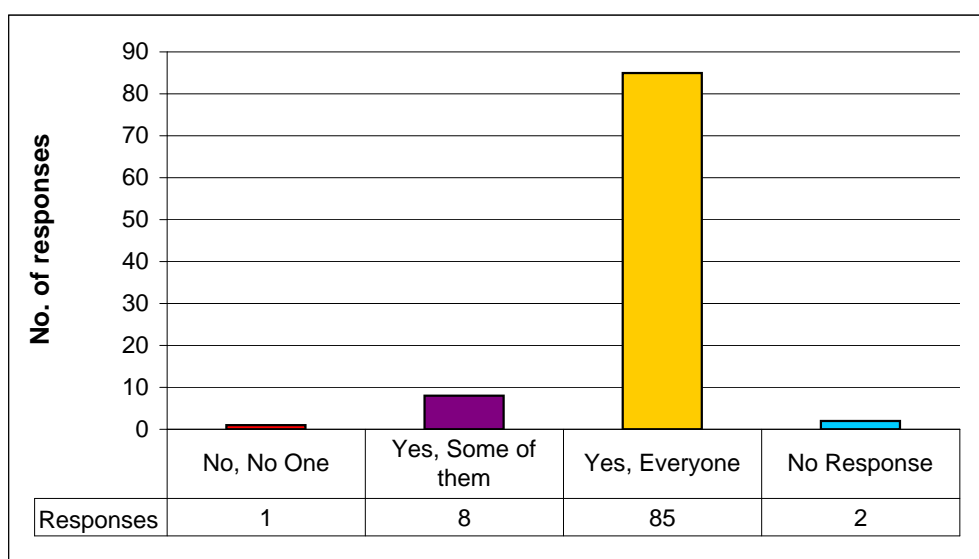
3. Did it help to talk to the Chair before the meeting?



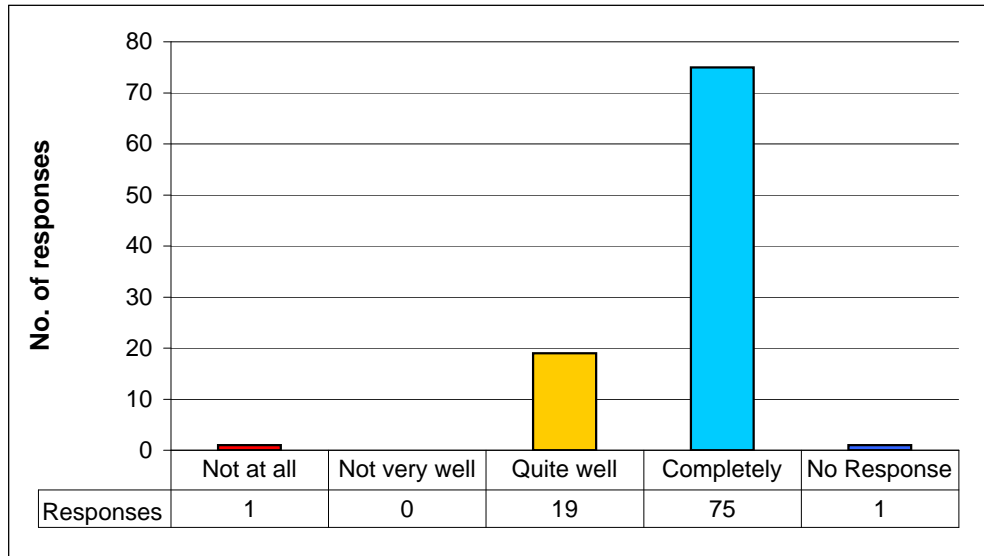
4. Did it help to be in the meeting room before everyone else?



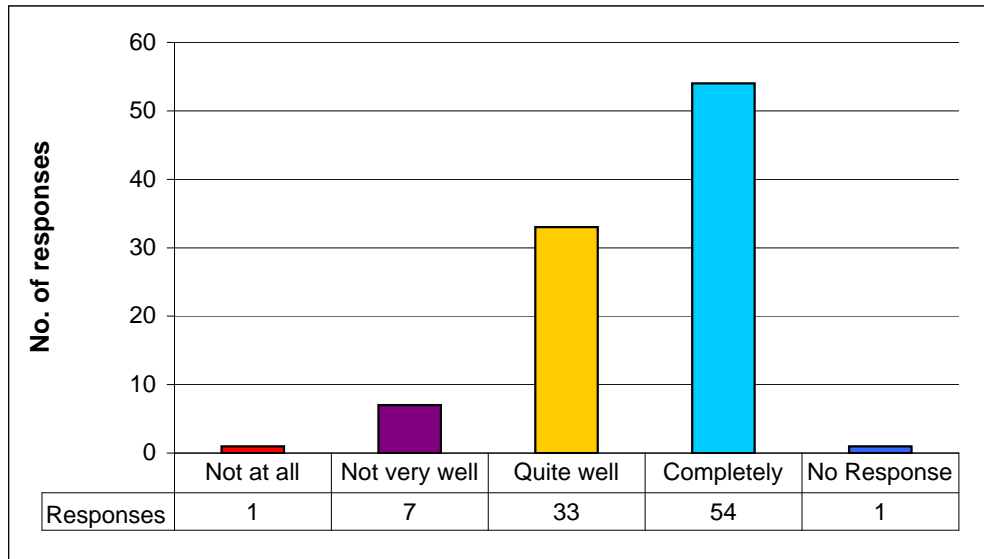
5. Were you told who everyone was at the meeting?



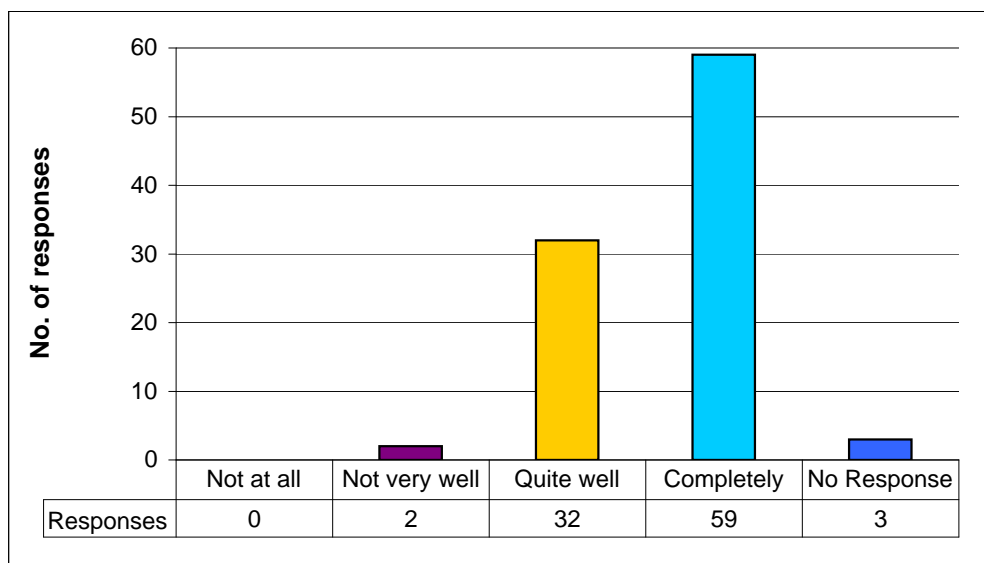
6. Did you understand why they were all there?



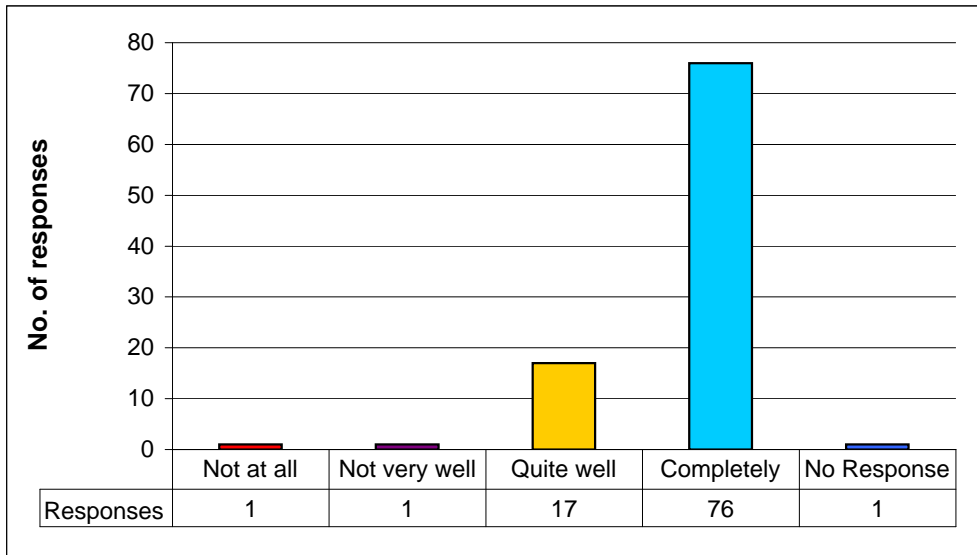
7. During the meeting, did you say all that you wanted to say?



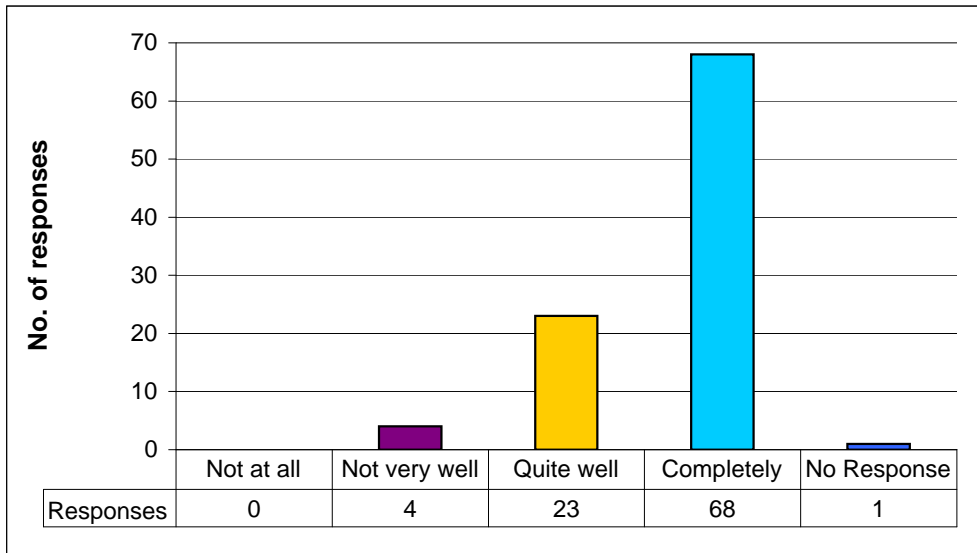
8. Did you understand the different parts of the meeting?



9. Do you understand what needs to change to make things better for your child in the future?



10. Do you think that the plan that was discussed in the meeting will help you to make these changes?



11. Were you given the opportunity to have your say about the plan?

